Representations of the "other" in selected artworks:

Re-membering the black male body.

Vulindlela Philani Elliott Nyoni

Declaration

This dissertation was undertaken at the Centre for Visual Art (School of Literary Studies, Media & Creative Arts), University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, under the supervision of Mr Michael Lambert.

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my own original work and, where the work of others has been used, it has been duly acknowledged in the text. The work has not been submitted in any form for a degree or diploma in any other university.

Signed: ....

(Michael Lambert) (Supervisor)

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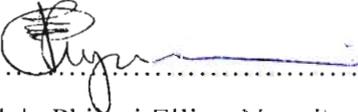
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And to Alan.

Dedication

For you, Mum.

Although you may be gone, your spirit resides in my heart and in everything I do.

Abstract

The depiction of blackness in the visual arts is located in the complex discourse of representation. Blackness within western visual art has been, and continues to be, viewed as oppositional to representations of whiteness, and is constantly perceived as *other*.

This dissertation analyses the process of *othering* and the impact of such a process on the production of artwork in southern Africa, where the representation of the black male, in particular, has been subjected to racist ideology, supported by its props, stereotype, generalization and the homogenization of black experience.

Using poststructuralist theories of identity construction and power, I analyse stereotype, racism and masculinity in the colonial and postcolonial periods, focussing especially on the internalization of white constructions of blackness within black visual culture.

I discuss the work of Baines as representative of colonial constructions of black masculinity, the work of Bhengu, Mapplethorpe and Makhoba as illustrative of the internalization of stereotypic identities, and the work of Voyiya, Harris and Nyoni as representative of resistant discourses of representation of the black male body. I situate the latter within the contemporary debate on questions of subjectivity and agency within the Foucauldian concept of power. I have deliberately chosen works by two American artists (Mapplethorpe and Harris) in order to situate discourses of blackness within a wider context.

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INTRODUCTION

"Black males have long intrigued the western imagination, whether as gods and kings in much of classical antiquity, or devils and sambos since the High Middle Ages. Sterling A. Brown, the pioneering black cultural critic, in 1937 identified seven prominent stereotypes of blacks that recur in American literature and art: Loyalty, Mirth, Servility, Quaintness, Exuberance, Brutishness, and Lust. The black male, in other words, has been represented in Western culture as the central enigma of a humanity wrapped in the darkest and deepest subliminal fantasies of Europe and America's collective cultural id " (Golden 1994: 12).

Black male identities have been constructed in various forms throughout western visual cultural history and, as illustrated by Golden, such constructions are multifaceted and constantly in flux, focussing at moments on perceived physical aspects (physical prowess, sex and the phallus), cultural signifiers (resistance and alterity), and at other times on the sociological roles of black masculinity (for example, demonising stereotypes of lawlessness or violence, attributed to black masculinity as inherent qualities). Examining stereotypical attitudes towards black males in western art and visual culture, as Golden does, demands that difference be deconstructed through an analysis of the ways in which black masculine identities are constructed in opposition to western white patriarchal superiority.

The core objective of this dissertation will be to question how (rather than why) it is that particular stereotypical perceptions, such as the above, have become entrenched in western socio-cultural epistemology. The answer may lie in examining the construction of difference within western(ised) societal and cultural structures and identifying the ways in which difference has been established, utilised and perpetuated through particular codes in western visual culture or, more simply, how stereotypes within western culture have constructed black male identities from the perspective of western onlookers, resulting in the internalisation of such stereotypes by black males.

The task demands isolating key moments in western art history and ideology where radical shifts in representation affect the construction of black male identity, resulting

in such rigid stereotyping. Embedded within this approach is the notion that stereotype is not only a means to debase, but also a means to identify what is familiar by comparison, and that it is in the exchange of perceiving *other* that self is affirmed. The act of defining and then portraying the *other* seems to confirm the self and the various qualities associated with self, in opposition to alterity.

As such a process is evident in colonial ideology, I intend exploring how it has contributed to the stereotyping of the black male in southern African art. Western culture, through hegemonic acts of colonialism, continues to dictate various black masculine identities within postcolonial societies indigenous to Africa or, as in the case of African-Americans, in the Diaspora. The tools by which the hierarchy of western European power established itself over cultures of Africa continue to affect the representation of black males within the visual arts locally and globally. Stereotype or the development of prejudiced perceptions of blackness have permeated contemporary visual culture and have become a questionable norm.

In addition, contemporary studies of black masculine identity will form the foundation of my research, such as Golden (1994) and hooks (2004), located within an exploration of African American masculinity and hegemonic patriarchy, and Ouzgane and Morrell (2005), within a southern African context. Research into black male identities within the visual arts has been conducted through more generalised approaches to blackness as *other*, for example, Boime (1990) and Record (1994), rather than through specifically gender-oriented approaches to issues of power, subjectivity and representation. Despite this, within cultural studies at present, there is an escalating interest in a decentralised reading of culture, history, society and gender. This involves the exploration of several possible configurations of meaning and reality, apart from a polarised and binary methodology, as is evident in the work of Weedon (1997) and Ouzgane and Morrell (2005), who deconstruct past structures of classification within language, culture, history, society and gender, in search of a poststructuralist re-reading.

It is my hypothesis that contemporary southern African black males are constantly subject to (re)defining themselves, their gender, sexuality and race, within an episteme of dominance and hegemony springing from the inculcation of white

western patriarchal ideology within the colonial era. The remnants of western patriarchal ideology are still evident in contemporary southern African visual culture, as exemplified by the many current discourses on race, culture and gender within the visual arts (Atkinson 1999).

If this is the case, I would like to ask black academics, artists and art theorists how and why, in a postcolonial society, colonial hegemony continues to have an impact on the self-identification of black masculine identities. It is my intention, therefore, to attempt to answer these questions by analysing selected examples of the representation of black males within colonial and postcolonial visual culture.

This study arises out of a concern, as a black male academic, for black agency and subjectivity within discourses of power and representation, masculinity and aesthetics. In the following chapters, I shall be exploring particular aspects of the construction of black male identity in art and society through the analysis of:

1) **Colonialism**: In this chapter, I shall analyse the effects of colonialism in southern Africa, in particular, the effects of patriarchal hegemony and colonial ideology on perceptions and representations of the 'indigene'. The attempt here will be to illustrate the correlation between colonial ideology and practice, and the construction of black masculinities through stereotypical thinking. The work of Thomas Baines and Anton van Wouw, as artists of the colonial era, will ground this chapter within the visual arts. Furthermore, this chapter will involve interrogating concepts of the 'native', 'primitivization' and 'ruling epistemologies', in order to formulate a definition of *othering*.

2) **Race, image, and power**: In this chapter, a close analysis of *othering* and alterity will continue, with particular reference to the construction of black masculinities in opposition to white hegemonic patriarchy. Particular markers of stereotype and prejudice will be examined as products of a hierarchical system of representation, illustrated through the selection of examples from the visual arts. With regards to the aesthetics of blackness, I will attempt to draw parallels with the black male body and the land as sites of contestation. I will pay close attention to the work of South African artist, Trevor Makhoba,

and the American artist, Robert Mapplethorpe, as central dialogues on stereotypes of black masculinity.

3) **Querying agency and subjectivity**: This chapter will seek to explore the question of voicing the *other* within networks of power and hegemonic construction of black masculinities. The potential for self-representation and subjectivity within dominant discourses of representation will be the central focus. To ground this discussion in the visual arts, chosen works for analysis will be those created by black male artists concerned with depicting their own bodies and culture as markers of their identities. Furthermore, I will seek to explore alternative representations of black masculinities that do not conform to the binary structures of western patriarchal hegemony. Contemporary work by black male visual artists, in southern Africa and the U.S.A., such as Vuyile Voyiya, Lyle Ashton Harris and Vulindlela Nyoni, will contextualise my exploration of voicing the self as postcolonial *other*.

The positioning of myself as a black academic and artist, who is concerned with the role of blackness and black masculinity within previously accepted euro-centric epistemologies and also participates professionally within a western tradition of art making, will form the standpoint for my analytical approach.

CHAPTER 1

1.1. QUERYING COLONIALISM AND COLONIAL IMAGERY IN AFRICA

Hegemonic readings of blackness permeate southern African visual culture impacting on the many modes of representing black males. Codes and systems of understanding and interpreting ethnicity, race, sexuality and gender based on colonial hierarchical epistemologies have influenced approaches to looking, seeing and responding to the black body. This chapter seeks to explore the effects colonialism had on past southern African societies and to question the repercussions of its ideologies in contemporary visual culture. I am beginning this discussion with a brief review of the historical context.

As is becoming more evident within current studies of western art history (Landau and Kaspin 2002; Earle and Lowe 2005), there have been several instances where black Africans were represented in western aesthetics and culture since before the 16th century, a period which saw heightened contact with Europe and Africa through exploration, trade and expedition, and the later trans-Atlantic slave trade.

The slave trade in Europe and the Americas serves as a particular marker in an historical examination of perceived blackness and the stereotypes associated with it. Undoubtedly the establishment and legitimisation of slavery was influenced by various stereotypes associated with blackness, which underpinned growing western ideologies of superiority and civilisation, based on colour and cultural difference. It would also be true to say that these stereotypes were, in turn, perpetuated through the actual acts of slavery and subordination.

Significantly, the assumption of a non-presence of blackness within western culture and aesthetics is due to the writing of history from a singular perspective that reflected the dominance of a western epistemology that differentiates between centre and *other*, western and non-western, civilised and uncivilised.

The classification of 'civilised' in western visual culture stems from Aristotelian typology for identifying and "assessing alien people and dividing them into the

civilised and the barbarian" (from the word *barbaros* meaning non-Greek speaking) (Earle and Lowe 2005: 8). As clarification, and in debt to Althusser's definition of ideology, Earle and Lowe explain that civilisation is dependant on a number of factors "concerning hierarchical structure, social organisation and collective memory" which are reflected in institutions of civil society, for example, written laws, religion, governance and commerce, constructing the facets of an imagined ideological reality (ibid.). These assumptions about civilisation are the foundations of an ideology of 'civilised' behaviour within contemporary western(ised) societies.

Early Greco-Roman societies have provided the template for western ideologies of civilisation influencing both the practise of enforcing these ideologies, such as the law and judicial practices, as well as the selective processes supporting their establishment, for instance, schooling processes and the compartmentalisation of cognitive faculties, science and knowledge, culture and creed. The construction of difference arising from these practices has an impact on western civilisation because languages, skin colour and cultures were linked to attributes of alterity.

Africa essentially represented alterity. For, as Pieterse notes, "when the Greeks and the peoples of the Roman Empire wanted to represent a far off, prestigious but different land, they used the black as the sign of differentiation" (1992: 23). Using the aforementioned assumptions of civilisation, the classification, status and colonisation of many of the groups of sub-Saharan Africa were determined and supported by these ideological codes of difference, which would in turn fuel a colonial ideology that denoted anything different as *other*, but more so, a commodity that could be owned.

Europe, during the mid 19th century, was subject to a growing notion of imperialism and capitalism, major contributing factors to the well-known 'Scramble for Africa'. The Scramble would result in Africa's territories and peoples being physically divided up between the invading countries of Europe. As a legacy of colonialism, the physical borders established then as the extent of the colonies' territories still remain today as the borders of independent African states. As Cooper states, "at the time of conquest, industrial capitalism in Europe had reached a stage of great complexity and considerable---if hardly unchallenged---self-confidence: Europeans thought they

knew what kind of economic structures would lead to progress in the colonies as well as at home" (in Dirks 1992: 209).

Coupled with the 'competitive' nature of nationalist growth and industrialisation, the need within most European countries was to find new markets to export to as well as to import from. Mackenzie explains, "colonies could offer assured markets, particularly if the European state's relationship with them was protected by tariffs which would keep the competitors out" (1983: 31). Commodity and ownership of markets thus fuelled the drive for exploration into the African continent and evolved into the marking off of boundaries and borders. The accumulation of wealth and territory resulted in the growth not only of European empires, such as the British, French, German, Dutch and Portuguese, as economic and cultural powers, but also validated the strength of national identity and cultural superiority for the conquering imperialists.

Exploration and the expansion of colonialism, however, were not fuelled only by economic needs. Within Europe, the influence of 'Rousseauian' views of humanity and the emergence of nation states and nationalist identities resulted in debates about nature and the role it played in the 'civilised' world. Developing national identities within the imperial era led explorers and settlers alike to defend and inculcate the values and perceptions of the nation from which they originated, in specific contrast to the 'natural' noble savages encountered within those areas destined for colonisation.

In essence, the drive, in this process of self-definition and inculcation of imported values, was to save the 'native' from him/herself. As Fanon so strikingly says: "The effect consciously sought by colonialism was to drive into the natives' heads the idea that if the settlers were to leave, they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation and bestiality" (in Williams 1994: 37). Fanon develops this idea further in 'On National Culture', when he states, "it (Colonialism) turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today..." (in Ashcroft 1995: 154) (*brackets inserted*).

Perceptions of cultural superiority, as illustrated in the words of Cecil John Rhodes, "I contend that we are the first race in the world, and that the more of the world we inhabit the better it is for the human race" (in Brooke-Smith 1987: 83), allowed for an almost complete seizure of the territories (and *minds*) of Africa. In essence this 'myth' of superiority was affirmed by an assumed sense of the non-human, uncivilised status of the indigenous peoples.

It is in the reaction to colonisation that dualistic notions of superiority are emphasised as "those who fight against white people tend instantly to be transformed into violent savages, without pity or other 'civilized' sentiments" (Root 1996: 37). Classifying the indigenous peoples as "savages" and non-humans, the myth of superiority held by the colonialists enabled them to take control over the social and political being of the indigene in the name of enlightened acculturation.

These ideological aspects of colonialism, the economic and philosophical, as well as the socio-political, underpinned the methods of incursion and the process of colonization. Eventually it would be the British who laid claim to most of southern Africa. The Dutch had arrived in South Africa in the 1600s, using the Cape as a way station for their trade route to the East Indies, but, by the 1800s, they had already established a permanent presence. Smaller groupings of Europeans, the French and German particularly, added to the growing mix of settlers during this time, but it was the arrival of the British that proved to be a more divisive factor in the formation of a specific colonial ideology in southern Africa, especially in their refusal to assimilate.

1.2. COLONIAL IDEOLOGY

According to Althusser, an ideology is a system of ideas that exists, supports and validates a knowledge or value system or "represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (1984: 36). An ideology is employed as the means by which a group can make sense of its 'reality' and, through a specific agency, for example, language, education and religion, it validates itself and the group. Once cemented into a philosophy of knowledge or epistemology, the ideology relies on the mechanisms it has in place (such as institutions of law and social values) to function.

Colonial ideologies are systems of ideas, assumptions and perceptions based on a functioning hierarchical structure of dominance and difference, ownership and commodity. However, as Helgerson suggests, in agreement with Althusser, within colonial ideologies there are embedded a number of "process(es) of practical and ideological adaptation" (in Dirks 1992:27) which raise questions about the subject and its position located in opposition to *other*. Althusser surmises that the subject is constitutive of, and constituted by, all ideologies. Colonial ideologies are no exception, as within such ideologies the role of the subject is constantly renegotiated between the contexts of self and *other*.

For example, in the case of the coloniser and the colonised, both were subject to the ideology of colonialism, which created discourses in which dominance and control were inextricably linked to difference and *othering*. The colonisers presumably compared the perceived differences of what and whom they were colonising and so, in this way, created various identities underpinned by colonial ideology. Ideologies function as understandings and positions shared by a group.

Seldom is the formulation of an ideology consciously present in an individual's thought processes, but the ideology and the ways in which it is deployed can structure the ways in which an individual's thought processes operate and so influence behaviour. If this is so, then "…ideologies may be succinctly defined as the *basis of social representations shared by members of a group* (sic). This means that ideologies allow people, as group members, to organise the multitude of social beliefs about what is the case, good or bad, right or wrong, *for them* (sic), and to act accordingly" (in van Dijk 1998: 8).

As Althusser himself says, "ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (1984: 36), which implies that, although perceptions of the real exist within the mind of an individual, the means by which the reality is defined is based on imaginary perceptions. This leads us to question the means by which the ideology succeeds as a truth. 'Truth' and the perceptions of 'truth' become even more significant as we examine colonial and postcolonial art and the connections between art and ideology.

Art is reliant on particular ideologies, as it becomes the vehicle through which embedded ideological standpoints may be exploited, revealed and perpetuated. As Record states, "whilst art reflects the social reality and social thinking of its own society, it simultaneously reinforces societal perceptions and beliefs, and since artworks have a certain degree of permanency, they serve to reconfirm such beliefs, passing them on through time" (1994: 12). Art is reliant on factors such as what constitutes art: who makes it, and how and *where* it is displayed.

Art has been reliant on the creation of an arena or gallery in which to display the finished work, catalogued according to the delineations between disciplines, such as painting, print-making, ceramics and drawing, which, in modernist discourses of power, elevate art beyond the status of craft. Althusser believes "that the peculiarity of art is to make us see, make us perceive, make us feel something which alludes to reality" (1984: 174). Althusser goes on to state that this allusion, this internal perception of allusion to reality, is also a perception of the "very ideology in which they (it) is held" (1984: 175). 'Real art' is created by systematically responding to and acknowledging embedded ideologies in these allusions to reality. In the colonial era in southern Africa, art made by colonists and settlers (e.g. work by Baines and I'Ons) reflected the ideologies that alluded to and represented a perceived colonial reality.

Using Althusser's definition of ideology as a basis, I intend to identify the particular frameworks and structures that colonial ideologies employ. As already stated, the general perception of southern Africa by 19th century European colonists was that the indigene was inferior, physically, intellectually and technologically. Perceived cultural superiority and power is the basis of this perception. Power in this sense is linked intrinsically to the values applied to differing systems of knowledge and the cultures in which they originate.

According to Foucault, "methods of government render phenomena (such as the expanding number of people) into objects (such as population) amenable to scientific study. Simultaneously, scientific methodologies provide knowledge of these objects that renders them amenable to government" (in Simons 1995: 27). For the colonists,

knowledge was embedded in their sense of what civilisation was, what correct social orders relating to gender, social class and labour were, what economy meant, what justified a means of production and how it could be exploited, what religion was (or rather what the 'correct' religion was), and what language was.

All these means of evaluating the indigene became ways of control in the eyes of the colonist. It thus became the colonists' perceived obligation to educate, govern and save the indigene from their regressive existence and enlighten 'them' to the 'true' nature of humanity away from the 'natural' state. A central factor is the reflexive nature of this ideology. The affirmation of a colonial ideology is dependent on the comparison of colonial ideals to and against qualities deemed negative or contrary, and therefore settlers in the 'new land' set about discovering what the land and its peoples had to offer and compared themselves to this in order to define themselves, in the light of their 'imagined relationship' to the real conditions of existence.

In effect, as cohesive as it may have seemed, colonial ideology was never explicitly theorised from the beginning, but rather it evolved, moulded and inculcated its principles through a process of interaction with the indigene. The ideology, in practice, allowed for hegemony to develop, considering anything outside of it as being of lesser significance, unless it served to validate the ideology or could be appropriated and claimed.

The selective methods of inculcating colonial ideological hegemony need to be understood, if one is to make any sense of colonialism. As Stoler suggests, "… the structural constraints of colonial capitalism not only shaped indigenous changes in community and class, but by turns destroyed, preserved, and froze traditional relations of power and production, and as frequently reinvented and conjured them up" (in Dirks 1992:319). Colonial (capitalist) ideology affected the colonized society by imposing structures of wage economies, labour, output and resources affecting, in turn, indigenous perceptions of work, class and gender.

What was being altered was an indigenous structure of work, gender and class. Cooper notes that "Zulu workers in mid-nineteenth-century South Africa had an identifiable work culture, only it was not the work culture of the white conquerors

and employers" (in Dirks 1992: 211) and was consequently not recognised. Zulus were then labelled 'lazy workers' and were designated particular roles within the socio-economic paradigm that reflected the colonialist ideology. For example, work that was more physical and repetitive, such as housework, heavy labour, mine-work, gardening and railway work, was assigned to the indigene.

The social dynamic that began to emerge in the colonies reflected class, gender and, most importantly, racial distinctions, through capitalist notions of resource and output. When put into practice, the power of colonial ideology rested in what van Dijk refers to as 'persuasive' power. "In this case, control does not take place (primarily) through physical or socio-economic coercion, but by more subtle and indirect control of the minds of the dominated" (1998: 162). Persuasive adjusting of the indigene's self-perception was and is affected by the devaluation of traditions, customs and social orders identified as being non-European, through the inculcating of European value systems of education, religion and economics.

Modes of classifying non-European customs, social orders and traditions have become the focus of contemporary cultural theory, as revealed in current attempts to deconstruct terms such as natural, primitive and *other*. These codes and classification contribute to what St Aubin calls the "Vocabulary of Racial Difference" (Ouzgane and Morrell 2005: 23). Apart from the imperialist hierarchical vocabulary (both in English and Afrikaans), which was evolving within the spoken language defining *other* (for example, common uses of the words Native, Non-White, Non-European, Negro, Darkie and Kaffir)[1], scientific study was also used to legitimise the existence of supposed differences between white and black subjects, particularly males.

As the occupation of African territories became increasingly important and the black race harboured the potential for the political subversion of white supremacy, European vocabulary, which demonised the 'native', sought to encapsulate perceived traits of blackness and perpetuate stereotypes.

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[1] Of Arabic origin, this word originally had religious connotations when referring to a non-believer of the Islamic faith. The meaning then shifted in its context and kaffir became racially derogatory in early Cape Dutch. Van Riebeeck refers to 'swarte caffers' (black kaffirs) in his journal (16.12. 1660). *Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa*, (6), ('Kaffir').

In addition to those mentioned above, other examples of hierarchical vocabulary inherent to the process of *othering* were: the *'sambo'*--- or, in the words of Earle and Lowe, "feckless children of nature prone to physicality"(2005: 72); *'lazy Africans'*--- a stereotypical perception which enabled Europeans to lay claim to territories or *terra nullius* (the 'land of no-one'), as Africans 'constantly' proved their lack of industriousness and so did not deserve the land; *the slave*---religious texts were used to designate the sons of Ham, cursed forever by God to be slaves; the *'nigger'*--- derived from Negro, a pejorative title based on skin colour, and reflective of a lower civil and human status, particularly within American slave trading history, and the *'cannibal'*---a violent and devilish illustration of the nature of blackness 'untamed' and dangerous, a threat to civilized humanity.

As St Aubin argues, racial differentiation became a necessity as "the notion that black men could be linked biologically to white men was the source of great anxiety... It is a kind of anxiety and fear of loss of self or loss of identity that occurs when boundaries are deemed fluid. It is a combination of arousal and discomfort, of fascination and revulsion... Black male corporeality and black masculinity were indeed to European men of science grotesque and grotesquely familiar" (2005: 24-25). Colonialist ideology moved towards proving the 'natural' differences between Africans and Europeans for the sake of preserving the superiority of European cultures and race through ethnographic and scientific research.

Pacteau refers to particular texts, which affirmed and supported these perceptions, and reveals how these texts went as far as to suggest a gendered racial argument in which "Blacks and Jews, considered to be very sensual, are defined as feminine" (in Bloom 1999a: 91). In Eichtal and Urbain's *Lettres sur la race noire et la race blanche* the perception is clearly that "the black appears...to be the female race in the human family, while the white is the male race" (ibid.), thus positioning the racial debate within the patriarchal gendered confines of power and subversion.

Methods of subverting indigenous culture were based on calculated and philosophical approaches to the matter of difference and reaffirmed by the scientific exploration of difference spurred on by an ideology of European superiority. Rendering difference became subject to the embedded principles of colonialist thought and practice.

An example of the search for scientific and anthropological evidence of difference was the display and classification of Saartjie Baartman, a South African San/Bushman woman, transported to London in 1810, and publicly displayed as an anomaly to humanity, a freak of nature and proof of the distinct differences between white and black. Baartman, after being subjected to inhumane treatment during the last years of her life was then dissected post-mortem, and her organs placed on permanent display, and she "became associated, in the discourse of physical anthropology, with 'deviant' sexuality and most particularly with the purported lasciviousness of the prostitute" (Pacteau 1999: 90).

The scientific defence of difference would, in this manner, continue to focus on the carnal, the grotesque, and the descent of humanity through the black body. Similarly, the black male would 'harbour' proof of difference based on noted exterior physical differences, forming the basis for many stereotypes of black masculinity associated with violence and sexuality.

With Darwin's publication of *The Origin of Species* in 1859, which created a radically new scientific epistemology for the study of the development of 'man' and civilizations and invented the study of 'prehistory', theories of civilisation, based on physiognomic differences between the peoples of the known world, informed a system that classified Caucasians at the pinnacle of human evolution and Africans within the strata of 'subhuman'. Like Baartman, black males were scrutinized for phrenological and sexual 'abnormalities' and conclusions were reached that suggested "if black men were bestial in their sexual needs, it was proof that they had not evolved significantly as a race much beyond their 'animal subhuman ancestors'" (St Aubin 2005: 35).

The conclusions reached through such notions would be reflected in colonial visual imagery, as is illustrated in the works of Baines. Perceiving the 'native' as representative of a bygone state of human evolution underpinned the aforementioned ideologies of civilisation and culture, and Baines is reputed to have carried out his ethnographic studies of 'natives', as one would examine a specimen of flora or fauna. Of Baines' imagery, Davidson and Klopper argue, "that images of this kind

reinforced the notion that Africans were low on the scale of cultural development, a view that Baines also expressed in his journals" (in Stevenson 1999:102). Clearly "Less civilised *'others'* remained of interest not only as exotic curiosities and potential converts to Christianity, but "as a reference against which Europeans could measure their own elevated degree of civilisation" (ibid.).

The notion of focussing on the Prehistoric within the examination of a 'native' culture cultivates a tendency to portray the indigene as a 'historical artefact' (Goldie 1995: 236). Hence the manner in which black Africans were displayed suggested a childlike naïveté, and "a remnant of a golden age that seems to have little connection to anything akin to contemporary life" (ibid.).

So far I have examined the features of colonial ideology and the means by which these were a reflection of the 'imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence'. I have established that colonial ideology is reflected within western visual culture in the representation of anything it deems as *other* as inherently (and scientifically) inferior.

It is important to note the functioning of this ideology within an African context. I have endeavoured to reveal how colonial ideology operates (using Althusser's definition of ideology) and, in relation to colonialism in southern Africa, begun to isolate a definition of *otherness* relative to western perceptions of civilisation, culture, stereotype, race and gender. In the following section, I begin with an examination of *how* precisely such an ideology constructs the 'imaginary relationship' of individuals to the realities of their African existence.

1.3. THE RISE OF PREJUDICE: SHAPING A WORLDVIEW

The deployment of colonial ideology in Africa revealed that one of the most enduring ideological props was the creation and perpetuation of stereotypes, which underpin the structure of the cultural imaginary. Allport effectively defines stereotype, in relation to its Greek roots, as an "unduly fixed mental impression" (in Earle and Lowe 2005: 17).

He refines his definition further by clarifying that stereotype is "an exaggerated belief associated with a category... [whose] function is to justify (rationalize) our conduct in relation to that category" (Earle and Lowe 2005: 17) (*brackets inserted*). This definition supports Althusser's concept of ideology as stereotypes operate as building blocks of the imaginary used to describe one's relationship to reality. Stereotyping blackness during the colonial era resided in the historically fixed 'mental impressions' of the colonists, their sense of civilised behaviour, religious values and cultural practice.

Chronological documentation of these fixed 'mental impressions' is difficult to establish as the influences from which these derive span a multitude of sources throughout European history. From classical antiquity, blackness has been revered, feared, worshipped and defiled, in accordance to what function it served within a European ideological paradigm.

However, it seems that, at the peak of slave trading during the 16th century, various identifiable traces of *othering*, such as the practise of branding and the equating of a dark skin with subjugation, become part of a more rigid ideology of difference. As noted by Lowe, the dark skins of Africans (as varied as they were) became synonymous with inferiority: "the first, most fundamental and most deep-seated stereotype (one that was patently incorrect) was that all black Africans...were (and by extension were only fit to be) slaves" (Earle and Lowe 2005: 21). A dark skin was (and in some cases continues to be) the initial marker of a preconceived inferiority.

1.4. THE PORTRAYAL OF BLACKS: COLOUR SYMBOLISM

Stereotypes and generalizations are amongst the major props of ideology; how colonial cultures represented blackness to themselves and others is of paramount importance.

The black body has been represented visually within various contexts and by various cultures. Specific conventions, not only originating from a European perspective, began to arise within ancient art with regards to the perception of the black body. As Snowden records, "Egyptian artists often portrayed southerners with dark or intensely black skin, flat noses, thick lips, accentuated prognathism, tightly coiled hair represented by parallel braids, men and women wearing large circular earrings and women with pendulous breasts" (1983: 12). In Egyptian colour symbolism, however, black is not associated with the negative; on the contrary, it is associated with rich fertility and the afterlife (Bunson 1995: 55). However, as early as 1400BCE (the period of the Egyptian Middle Kingdom), a form of stylisation or canon of representation of blackness had developed, which formed the basis for the perpetuation of these stereotypes in Greco-Roman art, stereotypes which have persisted through to colonial art, with its reverence for the classical, and contemporary art.

Greco-Roman and Christian black-white colour symbolism impacted greatly on the association of these stereotypes with subsequent colour prejudice. Snowden records that "among the Greeks and Romans, white was generally associated with light and day, with Olympus and victims sacrificed to the higher gods, ...black with night and darkness, with the Underworld, death and chthonian deities with bad characters and ill omens" (1983:82).

Early Christian doctrine inherited this pagan symbolism of night and day and applied it to its philosophy of paradise and hell "where the colour black began to acquire negative connotations, as the colour of sin and darkness" (Pieterse 1992: 24). Within the colonial era, visual language, bolstered by a Protestant version of Christianity which glorified the purity of whiteness, developed the negative connotations of blackness even further. A black devil was the ideal symbol with which to denigrate

the indigene even further, and justify his 'salvation' from his (un)natural state of blackness.

In Lowe's words, "a so-called black skin was almost uniformly condemned, and it was impossible for Africans to escape from the negative implications of their skin colour. Black and the devil were firmly allied in the popular imagination… and provided a cultural context for prejudice, and sneezing when a black African appeared was in Spain a primitive practice for warding off the devil" (2005:20).

The impact of religion on the perception of black is evident in Frederic Portal's text on colour symbolism in 1837. The text proved influential in establishing the relationship between evil and good and the structural polarity that ensued, where black was, as Boime illustrates, a "symbol of evil and falsity… not a colour, but rather the negation of all nuances and what they represent. Thus red represents divine love; but united to black it represents infernal love, egotism, hatred and all the passions of degraded man" (1990: 2).

Within the conventions of western art-making, black and its association with the darkness of evil was contrasted with the use of white, which represented the good and pure. This is important as colour symbolism, associated with 19th century concepts of civilisation, progress and redemption, influenced the ideology of representation in the colonial era, perpetuating the symbol (black) as the allegorical signifier for the negative in culture and in art. Difference in socio-cultural practices, such as spoken and written language as a signifier of alterity, would eventually be linked to the presence of a visual distinction of difference, that is, the pigmentation of skin.

As a result, Boime notes that "this paved the way for the objectification of black people, for the stereotyping that shifted the connotative meanings to denotative level and categorically fixed the 'meaning' of black skin" (1990: 7). In a structuralist interpretation in which the signified relates to the signifier, the word 'black' signified a race of people, their cultures and history. This homogenization of entire peoples, cultures and histories under the category 'black' reflects the way in which colonial

ideology used structuring polarities and generalizations in order to deploy its ideology in practice.

Categorically fixing meaning in the word black as denotative of 'African' shapes the generalised perception that all Africans are black, despite the myriad skin tones, languages and cultures which constitute African identities. Colonial ideology refuses to engage with difference, as this would entail recognition of individuality and thus challenge the efficacy of stereotyping, which pivots on the denigration of difference.

Not only was a rigid dichotomy between white and black thus effected, but hierarchies were also created. As Boime says, "the white gaze that viewed black skin, through the awareness that white skin was more beautiful, was not just dichotomising, it was also hierarchising" (ibid). This means that settlers strove to define their 'European-ness' or cultural leadership by intentionally promoting the difference between what was European and white and what was *other* and black (primarily through visuality), at the same time asserting dominance and control over (and debasing) that which formed any resistance to this colour-based hierarchizing. As a result of this, Franz Fanon (1986) identifies a 'condition' of blackness, akin to a neurosis of inferiority, which develops through the imposition and internalisation of perceived European (and white) superiority. Racial prejudice is embedded in ideology and stereotype. Implicated in colonial ideological hegemony is patriarchy and the kinds of masculinities it shapes.

1.5. THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE 'NATIVE': COLONIAL MASCULINITIES

Colonialist ideology, as noted above, is rooted in patriarchal ideals of power and is associated with the forceful taking over of territories and the domination of the peoples indigenous to them. This kind of ideology is closely linked to hegemony which can usefully be defined as the representative power of one social system, structure or ideology over another, based on its perceived superiority or, as Gramsci states, its "cultural leadership" (in Williams and Chrisman 1994:134).

The implication here is that the subordinate society is evaluated in cultural and moral terms, defined by the hegemonic society. Important to an understanding of hegemony is that, similar to the establishment of colonialist ideology, hegemony does not occur instantaneously. In fact, "the most important feature of hegemony is that it always implies historical process" (Williams and Chrisman 1994: 152). Specific historical acts, whether outright demonstrations of authoritative power (e.g. war and slavery), or more covert expressions of coercion (e.g. religious conversion), contribute to hegemony and to hegemonic masculinity.

Hegemonic colonial masculinity encapsulates relationships of power and dominance over *other*, deploying the kind of ideology and stereotypes analysed previously. As Beynon notes, gender is deeply rooted in networks of power where, "in the process, *other* masculinities are rendered inadequate or inferior, what Cornwall and Lindisfarne term subordinate variants" (2002: 16).

Hegemonic masculinity dominates other forms of masculinity (such as gay and black masculinities); thus colonial masculinity dominated indigenous masculinities (Kimmel 2005: 180). Victorian masculinity (white, patriarchal and triumphalist) was constructed in relation to European notions of civilisation and technological progress. This was not necessarily an upper middle-class masculinity, as is suggested by the British administrative and military class in India. The tradition of "imperialist military adventure" certainly contributed to the forging of the "virtually omnipotent English-British masculinity" (Roper and Tosh 1991:120). However, as Connell has noted, "colonial conquest was mainly carried out by segregated groups of men--- soldiers, sailors, traders, administrators and a good many who were all these by turn" (Kimmel 2005: 74). In southern Africa, a mixture of classes seems to have shaped a particular form of white settler masculinity, which defined itself in relation to Boer and indigenous masculinities (subordinate masculinities) (Morrell 2001). In fact the denigration of indigenous masculinities resulted in the feminization of the indigene and/or his reduction to childlike status.

One of the methods in which colonial masculinity legitimised itself was through the popularisation of colonial fantasies, such as in the works of H. Rider Haggard (e.g. *King Solomon's Mines*), which glorified British masculinity and disempowered and

degendered any form of alterity, through the use of stereotype and prejudice. In addition to literature, similar ideological strategies (whether conscious or not) are evident in the visual arts. A pencil and watercolour sketch by artist and ethnographer Thomas Baines, entitled Monday, Noon (1843) (see **Plate 1**), demonstrates exactly how colonial ideology perceived and represented the indigene.

Baines, artist, cartographer, geologist and naturalist, was perhaps one of the foremost figures within what may be called the colonial descriptive arts. Although he was considered to be more of a scientific explorer in his time, Baines's collection of descriptive and detailed images, paintings, sketches and photographs are now presented in prestigious art galleries internationally and are hailed as colonial art forms reflective of the period.

Affiliations with scientific societies such as the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew and the Royal Geographical Society (from which he received funding) supported the perception that Baines was, as described by Stevenson (1999: 12), in the service of science. In Monday, Noon, Baines illustrates himself riding a horse in mid gallop. As he rides, he looks down upon five black men, who are running next to him. One of them in turn looks back up at him, as they all obligingly keep stride with the horse's apparently fast pace.

Traditionally, European representations of riders on horseback would be reserved for nobility or heroes, such as the French neo-classicist David's portrait of Napoleon crossing the Alps (1801) (see **Plate 2**), a heroic representation of Napoleon on a whiter charger rearing up, with Napoleon (making direct eye contact with the viewer) pointing the way forward. The elevated stance of the rider on horseback serves to remind the viewer of the rank and social standing of the rider and contributes to creating the myth of Napoleon as hero. Certainly, Baines in this image represents an ideology that understands 'Europeaness' as hierarchically superior to the Africanness of the five porters/guides.

Baines smiles bemusedly at the guides as they run alongside, their stride matching that of the horse, perhaps marvelling at their physical strength and prowess. The black males' role was to cater for Baines' every need in his travels. The illustrated

men are not named and no allusion is made to their cultural origin, but their role in the image, as beasts of burden, much like the horse Baines rides, is clear. In short, this image is a remarkable representation of hegemonic colonial masculinity structured in relation to subordinate (and homogenized) Black masculinity. The physical prowess of the porters is significant as it depicts another feature of colonial masculinity: the exoticisation of the indigene. White settler masculinity is the 'norm': any deviant form of masculinity is dangerously exotic and has a mysterious allure (rather like women).

1.6. THE QUESTION OF ETHNOGRAPHY: PICTURING THE NATIVE

As Davidson and Klopper note, "Baines' tendency to filter his experiences through familiar visual codes is also apparent in many of his other works" (in Stevenson 1999: 101). In fact he created many visual documentations not dissimilar to Monday Noon, in which the native is representative of alterity, either as beast of burden, or as the exotic and uncivilised.

Ethnographic accounts of blackness resulted in the various 'scientific' renderings of black peoples. These were accompanied by documentation and representations that suggested differences based on biological characteristics, established by scientific disciplines such as phrenology and physiognomy. This documentation was displayed, assessed and catalogued within a museological space, as was the case with Saartjie Baartman and the display of her body in a scientific context. It was not unusual to find an artist or a writer in the service of the colonists meeting the inhabitants, travelling around the land, and committing most of what he experienced to paper or canvas, thus perpetuating the stereotypes I have discussed.

In visual representations, 'natives' were commonly juxtaposed with animals, wild and domesticated (e.g. zebras, monkeys, baboons, horses, dogs), in order to illustrate " the evolutionary narrative of the civilizing process" (Landau and Kaspin 2002:236), as is evident in Baines's Monday, Noon. Other depictions of black persons (and specifically black males) demonstrated links between blacks and the animal kingdom by comparing the physical appearance of the black human being to that of the primate. There were yet other representations which associated the indigene with

savagery and cannibalism in order to illustrate the deviance of a pagan civilisation and thus "to justify the brutalization (sic) of the colonized..." (Mercer and Julien in Golden 1994: 194).

Baines's work perfectly illustrates this ethnographic process. Baines has been described as "an explorer-artist" (Carruthers and Arnold 1995: 13) which suggests that his art was inextricably linked to his settler masculinity. Apart from the ethnographies of indigenous peoples, he also documented the flora and fauna he considered exotic.

In a work such as War dance under a fig tree (1859) (see **Plate 3**), the attention paid to the botanical and zoological elements far surpasses that which he gives to the people in the image, revealing perhaps colonial perceptions of the indigene's relationship with the natural, thus resulting in the indistinguishable mass of Zulu warriors standing in front of a distinctly recognisable species of tree. In fact, what Baines represents contradicts the injunction of the London Ethnological Society (1843): "We are seeking facts, and not inferences; what is observed and not what is thought" (in Stevenson 1999: 91). Baines tells us exactly what he thinks. In the image the Zulu warriors seem to meld seamlessly into one organic and perhaps threatening mass of dark bodies. The indigene is exotic like the flora; the indigene is a 'noble savage' in his natural state, which is worth documenting; the indigene (like nature) can be dangerous.

In contrast to the above, in most of the representations of specific characters, such as chiefs, kings and servants from indigenous groups (male and female), Baines chooses to romanticise the subject and also simplify whatever the person or people in the painting are doing. In a work entitled No Bengula, the king elect of Matabeleland: en famille (1869) (see **Plate 4**), we find an example of Baines constructing a somewhat over-exoticised impression of the gathering.

The poses are characteristic of the colonial perception of what exotic Africa was supposed to be with "No Bengula" (or rather Lobengula), lounging lavishly dressed in western clothes, surrounded by several naked black women, while he smokes his pipe. This is to some extent reminiscent of the tradition of European romantics such

as Turner and Delacroix (e.g. Delacroix's The Death of Sardanapalus, 1827) (see **Plate 5**) in whose works *other* is constructed as deviant, exotic and bizarre.

No Bengula clearly constructs the masculinity of the black indigene as stereotypically wild, hedonistic and sexually deviant. Baines obviously conceives of this masculinity as subordinate to the colonial masculinity which he, the 'explorer-artist' exemplifies. As Kimmel states: "the conqueror was virile and the colonized dirty, sexualised and effeminate or childlike" (2005: 75).

With regards to Lobengula's dress, Stevenson remarks, "the selective adoption of western clothing by Lobengula affirms his ability to interface between different cultural domains and systems of value" (1999: 99). However, the western dress also positions Lobengula in that marginal, liminal space between cultures. Marginality is also an important aspect of subordinate masculinities. Furthermore the juxtaposition of material cultures in the image suggests mimicry of colonial style and consequent change in value systems, undermining the significance of the indigenous (Stevenson 1999:97). In addition, the kingship or authority of Lobengula is subverted through the sheer sense of idleness that is portrayed in the composition where, as the king elect of the Matabele, he is seen as perpetuating the stereotypical attitude of the 'lazy African'. The hierarchizing nature of hegemonic masculinity has to undermine the authority of the indigene. Whereas the traditional European royal portraits, with the notable exception of Goya's satirical portraits, reflect the nature of responsibilities attributed to the monarch with stoic severity, Lobengula's portrait questions his authority and capability, and undermines it.

Within the context of the War dance, other works of Baines, which document 'other' cultures, exemplify the primitive nature of the subjects being portrayed. Thus figures squat and seem to be involved in some particular menial domestic task, such as in "Dressing the Issiyoko or Warrior's headring" (1869) (see **Plate 6**), or are simply seated on the ground in a passive or submissive manner. In this way the images serve to remind the spectators of the native's proximity to the natural. This concept is of relevance to the issue of representation as, in the late nineteenth century, photography began to influence the ways in which data or images were recorded by explorers.

Both the visual methods employed by artists like Baines and early photographers contributed to the construction of difference by juxtaposing a dark skinned person with an object or in clothing which created a visual dichotomy of dark against light, black against white, with its rich history of connotations outlined earlier. Examples of this are the many illustrations of black people which appeared towards the end of the 19th century in which black men and women, dressed in 'oriental' or western clothing, were portrayed serving colonials, thus representing colonial power structures and suggesting their static, immutable, eternal continuity.

Other forms of imagery, as Pieterse notes, "suggest the assimilation of Africans and black to nature and a low place on the ladder of evolution…" and "in addition to representations of African *as* (sic) animals there were representations of Africans *and* (sic) animals, brought together in a single image" (1992: 44-45). Colonial ideology utilises this method of 'nethering' or dislocating the subordinate and creating a space in which the *'other'* exists, unreachable and yet able to be controlled and viewed at will. In the construction of such images, various self-referential points are created which reinforce the concept as to how different and, by implication, superior to the subject they (the colonials) are. In Root's words, "art is often utilised to explain and to naturalise the display of authority, and the effects of this display can be extremely subtle and complex, profoundly influencing how we understand cultural, sexual, and other differences" (1996: 18).

Images such as Umtimuni, (Nephew of Chaka) (1849) (see **Plate 7**), by George French Angas, and other images of warriors on the 'rampage' such as War dance probably instilled fear into the viewers 'back home' and reminded them of the uncultured and uncontrollable nature of the black native. This promoted a sense of superiority over the 'savage' inculcating the belief that "the Negro represents natural man in all his wild and untamed nature" (Pieterse 1992:34).

Representation of the black indigene as primitive and simple is an aspect of the depiction of the 'Negro's' wild and untamed nature. So far illustrative works have been of the two-dimensional variety, but there are three-dimensional works that illustrate the representation of the primitive.

Anton van Wouw's Bushman (1902) (see **Plate 8**) and Bushman drinking (1907) (see **Plate 9**) focus on the 'uncomplicated' and 'simple' nature of the indigenous peoples as witnessed by the white settlers on their arrival on southern African soil. The manner in which Van Wouw portrays his subjects, dissociated from their surroundings as busts or tableaux, tranquillizes the subject's persona. Although we are presented with immaculately cast and 'finished' figures in action and at rest, Van Wouw chooses to over-naturalise the qualities of *otherness* to a point where 'animal-like' qualities are apparent. This is clearly evident in Bushman drinking in which a 'bushman' is shown drinking from a stream in a way that exemplifies the 'non-civilised' nature of the 'primitive' subject. The bushman adopts a posture of bringing his face to the water instead of utilising a drinking vessel that can be handheld. Bushman drinking exploits the way in which a bushman leans into a flowing stream to drink, focusing on the angularity of the bushman's body; the only other point of reference for the uninformed is a giraffe or antelope engaged in a similar activity. Despite Van Wouw's attention to detail, these works present an attitude supportive of a social ordering that positions the black indigene as inferior.

In a work entitled Bushman, Van Wouw depicts a nameless member of the Khoi-San people. The man stares out beyond the viewer in a way that suggests that he may have been oblivious to the fact that he was being turned into a sculpture. This kind of representation denies the subject any interaction with the viewer, let alone with the artist. Van Wouw's sculpture seems to be based solely on the idea of the capturing the indigene in his or her utmost natural state, thus demonstrating the process of *othering* the simple native.

1.7. ARTISTS IN COLONIAL TIMES: BAINES AND BHENGU

As discussed above, the practice of ethnography as art made 'discoveries' which validated the inferiority of black peoples. This art was not only the product of white colonial artists. As a black artist, Gerard Bhengu created portraits which also served as ethnographic studies of indigenous culture.

In comparison to Baines's work, Bhengu's works are slightly different, but still operate within the complex discourse of imagery that establishes a coherent ethnic

identity (Leeb du Toit 1997: 16-20). After his employment by Dr. Max Joseph Kohler at the Marianhill Mission station at Centecow, Bhengu was often involved in creating images for amateur and professional ethnologists.

Portrayal of *other* through imagery that defined ethnographic difference was, as Leeb du Toit states, "prompted by appeals from critics such as Leo Francois for less tedious and limited repertoire in local art where landscape predominated, and partly by the quest for a national identity in art" (1996: 16). The representations of traditional Zulu cultural life styles could, of course, also be considered 'scientific' documentation as Baines's work was intended to be: Bhengu's images were used by state ethnologists in support of the then Department of Native Affairs (ibid.), whose policies contributed to the *othering* processes of *apartheid*.

From working with Kohler, Bhengu moved on to work for or be commissioned by several different ethnologists. Bhengu's market had already been established for him and his works were created for a predominantly European clientele. Zaverdinos notes that "in view of this, Kohler's audience was one that expected scientific precision, simultaneously imbued with a sense of nostalgia for a 'primitive' (sic) way of life long lost to Europeans" (1995: 5).

Crucial to this dissertation are the works that Bhengu produced that involved some sense of interpretation of the masculine in African culture. In particular, I would like to refer to the works entitled <u>Portrait of a man,</u> (there are two works with this title), and <u>Portrait showing facial scarification of the Bhaca clan,</u> (dates for these works unavailable) (see **Plates 10, 11**).

The first two <u>Portraits</u> are perhaps more familiar representations by Bhengu. The images are of two elderly black males traditionally dressed and smiling mirthfully, as if having their picture taken with a modern-day camera. At this point in his life, Bhengu was under the patronage of Payne Brothers, a large department store in Durban. The portraits and other works by Bhengu were made to be sold to the tourist clientele, who would take the works home, as the examples of work by a truly South African black artist who drew and painted truly authentic traditional dress and artefacts.

Bhengu's images were appreciated for their accuracy and attention to detail, but more importantly, they were viewed as ethnographic or anthropological documentation, rather than art, the reason being, as Zaverdinos points out, that "African cultural practice and mythography were seen as synonymous with the primal origins of humanity and were lauded for qualities such as purity, innocence and authenticity" (ibid.). It is significant, however, to note that, unlike Baines' work, which was more 'scientific' in its approach, Bhengu's works are greatly detailed, revealing traditional scarification and distinct piercings, in addition to the physical features of the individuals portrayed.

But even though Bhengu's attention to detail was informative in ways that Baines' work was not, there are particular characteristics within his work which contributed to later stereotyping, for instance, in the perpetuation of European ideas of black culture as static an unchanging in its primitivism. As Leeb du Toit states, "Bhengu's work, then, was not solely based on personal experience and recollection, but was increasingly tempered by the historical anecdote and recollection in the interests of 'authenticity'. In this respect, it tended to reflect a western derived view of Zulu culture as finite and static…" (1996: 17). Thus Bhengu's image also helped construct the stereotypical *other* within the minds of the white observers. Each image could be seen as a slice of Zulu culture, frozen as a record of cultural difference.

For, as Root makes clear, "even those elements that at first glance appear positive, such as gentleness and sublimity, are part of a system of representation that objectifies difference as a way to justify racial and cultural supremacy" (1996: 46). The depiction of the male as a docile subject, always ready to have a likeness made, encouraged the perception of the self-subjugating passive black male. Bhengu's images, as created by a black artist, sanctioned the racial and cultural domination of *other*.

Bhengu's work illustrates how colonial ideology and its versions of black masculinities can be internalised by black artists, whose very subjectivity seems determined by western perceptions of the indigene and his 'culture'. The possibilities

for black agency and subjectivity within networks of power will be discussed in the final chapter.

1.8. SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 1

In this chapter, I have attempted to outline the processes by which the black male has been historically imbued with characteristics of *other*. Through an initial exploration of colonialism within southern Africa and the means by which indigenous cultures were made subject to colonial rule, I have endeavoured to show how colonial ideology and its masculinities, employing stereotypes and generalization in their construction of the 'native', contributed to the process of *othering*. I have used examples of art from the colonial period to illustrate the importance of representation to this process.

In the next chapter, I will be foregrounding and analysing concepts of power and subjugation with regards to race, gender and sexuality. We have established an identifiable structure that is colonial ideology and have been able to isolate some of its key functioning elements. As mentioned before, Fanon's theory of an internalised inferiority complex will contextualise the discourse on subjugation. It has also been the purpose of the first chapter to illustrate the vocabulary of stereotypical imagery within the context of colonialism. However, in light of the current theme of this dissertation and as a preamble to the next chapter, I wish to focus on matters of race, gender and power as constructed through white western patriarchy and reflect on the objectification and subjugation of the black male body as a site of an ideological dialectic.

CHAPTER 2

"I move slowly in the world, accustomed now to seek no longer for upheaval. I progress by crawling. And already I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am fixed" (Fanon 1986: 116)

2.1. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter concluded with demonstrating how colonial ideology impacted on the portrayal of black peoples as *other* and inferior to the European through the use of established stereotypes. I applied the notion of ideology as foundational to these perceptions, using Althusser's hypothesis that ideologies *represent* the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.

This chapter is grounded within the context of the visual arts, and will examine particular works in which the black/African male body is subjugated and objectified, in accordance with the ideology analysed in chapter one. In addition, I will be exploring how subjugatory processes are internalised through the mechanisms of this ideology---language, stereotypes, the gaze and structures of display, such as gallery spaces, are amongst these mechanisms. Discussion of the internalising of subjugation will be important, as this will lead to further exploration of agency in the final chapter.

The structure of this chapter is as a follows:

- **Exploring Subjugation**: questioning race and identity. This section will refer closely to the work of Fanon in establishing racialized black identity as a construct of white western supremacy. Internalisation of this racialized identity will also be discussed. In this section, analysis of the politics of racialization and identity will reinforce our exploration of *othering* within a postcolonial context.
- **Subjugating structures**: This section will look closely at aspects of the gaze and the gallery space as subjugatory constructs. Questions of power, objectification and display will be at the fore of this dialogue. hooks will

provide a basis for questioning aspects of power and representation of black masculine identity.

- **Art and subjugation**: Examples of the work of Mapplethorpe and Makhoba will be examined as visions of blackness and black masculinity that work within particular paradigms of hierarchy within representation. The chapter will conclude at the point where questions of agency and subjectivity initiate a discourse on an oppositional gaze separate from a "strategy of domination" (hooks 1992: 115)

2.2. EXPLORING SUBJUGATION

A discourse on the subjugation of blackness within contemporary postcolonial societies involves examining the structures that enforce and perpetuate subjugation. The following section on black identity will question aspects of racism and white supremacy as factors that affect the construction of black identities, and will attempt to outline the structures of racism that may contribute to the construction of black identity as *other*, inferior and homogenous within contemporary postcolonial society and, more importantly, within visual aesthetics.

This discourse on black identity will not only outline the problems or perception of black identity in the singular, or as an essentialised entity, but will also examine racial differentiation as a system of power and control in an ideology of dominance. It is important to focus on theories of race and racism which are used in support of a hierarchical ideology.

Taylor states that classical and modern race theory defines races as "cohort(s) of human individuals whose bodies and bloodlines are meaningful in ways that mark these individuals off as a set" (2004: 72). He acknowledges a structure behind such a system of identification and how this structure then impinges on other forms of identification such as gender, intensifying the signified status of an individual (and/or group) within an ideological hierarchy, for example *black* woman, *white* woman, *black* man, *white* man.

Isaac contradicts this kind of race theory with the view that "we no longer accept the idea that a nation or people can be seen to have a common ancestor. The same goes for the traditional use of race for a group of several tribes or peoples, regarded as forming a distinct ethnical stock" (2004: 25-26). Isaac reveals that the definition of race, once dependent on structures of knowledge and classification that resided in 'infallible' scientific evidence of difference, is, in fact, theoretical, political and social. In short, Isaac argues that 'race' means whatever the racist wants it to mean (ibid: 515). If 'race' only exists within racist ideology, it is important to consider how it functions or is deployed.

James notes "racism operates in different forms, at different levels... and can be indirect, unintentional, reflexive and unconscious" (2003: 137). As a result, James points out the existence of individual racism, institutional racism, and structural racisms, each of which has a particular mechanism unique to its function, which achieves the same result---a form of differentiation that leads to prejudice and subjugation (ibid). Structural racism employs the use of "rooted inequalities of society... to justify the allocation of racial groups to particular categories and class sites" (ibid), whereas institutional racism makes use of policies and rules to differentiate between 'race' groupings.

Individual racism is concerned with an individual's own premeditated prejudices towards another individual or social group. For James, racist differentiation reveals a dynamic of power and the need to preserve the power of the perceived dominant over the perceived inferior. He notes, after Isaac, it is in the understanding of the workings of race thinking and race talk that we realise that the "salient... way in which racism is conceptualised is not the biological or physical differences between groups but 'the public recognition of these differences as being significant for assessment, explanation and interaction'" (2003: 136).

It is precisely the 'public recognition of difference', which was essential to the operation of colonial ideology, and, one should add, the representation of that difference. Influenced by this ideology, race-talk and race-thinking have become essential, especially in southern Africa, to the way we identify and locate discourses about culture, but they also reflect the illusory nature of this ideology and how a

'reality' of difference is informed and perpetuated by a constructed system of classification. In order to emphasise the perception of race as fluid, intangible and a fiction, some scholars have begun to denote race as 'race' (Woodward 1997: 301), reflecting how racial definitions (like constructions of gender) constantly change throughout cultural and social history.

As discussed in the first chapter, colonial ideology relies on stereotype and generalization. So does racism. hooks (after Morrison) notes that race-talk is "the explicit insertion into everyday life of racial signs and symbols that have no meaning other than pressing African Americans to the lowest level of the racial hierarchy" (1995b:23). I have already examined linguistic stereotypes; hooks' words 'the explicit insertion into everyday life of racial signs and symbols' reinforce the importance of language in our understanding of race.

James draws attention to the role of generalization in racism: "racism is the uncritical acceptance of a negative social definition of a colonized or subordinate group typically identified by physical features (i.e., race- black, brown, yellow, red)" (2003: 136). Using 'red' to describe native north and south Americans ('red Indians'), 'yellow' to describe people of Asian descent ('the yellow peril') and 'black' to signify people of African descent ('the black problem') are examples of the ways in which racism employs generalization. Colonial ideology is thus inextricably linked to racist practices.

Interestingly, James neglects to include the racialized category of 'whiteness' within his definition of racism. This reflects the homogenising characteristic of hegemonic ideology that constructs *other* as powerless. 'Whiteness' (the unquestioned 'norm') reflects the relational aspects of structural racism in that "the dominant and 'normalized' (sic) white cultural identity, within the context of hegemonic relations in Western (sic) societies, can only be understood in relation to the discursively constructed '*others*'" (sic) (Taylor 2004: 29) (*italics inserted*). How can we talk about a 'blackness', separate from the negative, oppositional associations that linguistically, historically and socially define the word 'black' and being black, without resorting to dominant discourses about 'race' and 'identity'?

hooks (1995b: 158) refers to the process of renegotiating black identity or blackness as "de-colonizing the mind" and points out that this process is not rooted within the structures of opposition to domination, through reverse racism and counter-subjugation, but is linked more to the renegotiating of perceptions of blackness and the spaces in which black identity operates, including language.

However, renegotiating these spaces is difficult, for, as Fanon notes, these spaces become definitive because they create "a real dialectic between my body and the world" (1986: 111). Fanon suggests that 'blackness' is a state of being which black people are forced into adopting, through the marker of corporeal alterity or *otherness*. Gibson, after Fanon, argues that, as a result of this corporeal location of identity, black people are locked into being "the external *other*" (2003: 20) (*italics inserted*), which remains unchanged and fixed as 'not white', or 'non-European' in the language of *apartheid* South Africa.

2.3. BLACK IDENTITY

If black people are locked into being 'the external other', constantly the object of race-talk, race-thinking and racist practice, how does this impact on the socio-psychological construction of black identity/ies?

Identity, as Woodward defines it, is the means by which individuals can be "bonded on the most fundamental levels: national, 'racial', ethnic, regional, local" (1997: 301). Identity is about the negotiation of difference. This is evident, for example, in discourses about 'South African identity' or 'black South African identity' or 'black Xhosa-speaking South African identity' or 'black Zulu masculine identity', all of which situate one in discourses about nationality, 'race', gender and language. This emphasises the complexity and fluidity of the notion of identity.

One is not, however, simply situated in an identity discourse. As Woodward states, "identity also involves an understanding of agency and rational choice" (2002: ix). Thus one can choose to identity oneself as a 'gay black South African woman' or as a 'white, Afrikaans-speaking South African male'. There is thus a point at which one

engages with specific identity discourse. In postcolonial and poststructuralist discourses, scholars like Spivak (1988) and hooks (1992) have explored how the acknowledgment of an identity may reveal the degree of agency and rational choice involved in the assumption of an identity (this point will be discussed fully in chapter three of this dissertation).

How do black identities arise? It seems that the consciousness of being *other* is internalised within the black person such that the essence of being black is linked to his/her corporeality, a "racial epidermal schema" (Gibson 2003: 27). Because of this internalization of being *other* in relation to a globalized white dominance, Fanon goes so far as to state that the "Negro (sic) is phobogenic" (1986: 154) and beset with anxiety in his/her relationship to white European culture.

The reasons for this fear or anxiety, as Fanon later points out in his text, are many, but most are located within the corporeal and the sexual. The latter will be discussed later, in close examination of Mapplethorpe's images, which focus on the physical as a definitive trait of difference. In many ways this difference has been internalised by both black and white as being the 'natural' way of seeing the black-white dichotomy, through the internalization of white supremacist thought, which assigns value to these differences.

It is obvious why the corporeal is crucial to the formation of black identities. In Taylor's words, the human body is "the phenomenological aspect of human being: it is the way human being becomes known to the human senses" (2004: 15). Woodward refines this further by referring to the body in relation to the visual: "the visual offers a very powerful medium through which identities are presented. This applies to the bodies we inhabit as well as the images we look at. The body is the medium through which messages about identity are conveyed" (2002:118).

In the light of this, I argue, in the remainder of the dissertation, that the body is the immediate signifier of our identity, in relation to our interactions with other bodies, unless the interaction is inhibited by a state of physical impairment, such as blindness, or by 'disembodied' technological advances, such as communication by telephone or the Internet.

In respect of interaction that results in a racialized sense of self, Fanon states that "as long as the black man is among his own he will have no occasion, except in minor internal conflicts, to experience his being through others" (1986: 109). For Fanon, the concept of "lived experience" (Gibson 2003: 20) provides the basis for his understanding of blackness from a socio-psychological perspective. He clarifies 'lived experience' further by stating that the "lived experience of being black is rooted in the dualistic nature of *being* black and of *not being* white" (Fanon 1986: 110). Fanon believes that "blacks behave differently among whites than among blacks---behaviour which "is not ontological but a product of colonial relations" (in Gibson 2003: 16).

What is important in Fanon's remarks is the notion that identity arises from interaction with others, i.e. that identity may be signified by the body, but it actually lies outside the body, in the process of reciprocal relations with others. This idea that personal identity is created through interaction is echoed in the concept of *ubuntu* in southern Africa; *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (the essence of *ubuntu*) means that a person is a person through other people. However, through interaction with white western colonists, the black person was forced to identify him/herself in contrast to, and subject to, colonial white identities: thus a black person was/is a person (or a non-person) through white people.

In this process of identity formation through interaction, we perhaps find echoes of Lacan's developmental mirror phase of identity formation. In his development of Freudian psycho-analysis, Lacan suggested that every child, through gazing at him/herself in the mirror, experiences "in play the relation between the movements assumed in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it reduplicates---the child's own body, and the persons and things around him" (in Weedon 1997: 50-51). In this way, the child becomes aware of his/her identity in the very process of *othering* him/herself; "the child's ego becomes split into the I which is watching and the I which is watched" (ibid: 51). The child imagines that it is a unified itself, in full control, but this control is entirely imaginary and, in fact, the child *misrecognizes* itself.

How this mirror phase is relevant to our exploration of black identity construction is the suggestion that consciousness of black self may be shaped by a mirror which holds up the image of a white construct of blackness, in which the black person *misrecognizes* himself as in control of his unified identity. What Lacan reveals is that subjectivity of this nature is illusory and that "there is thus an ongoing system of identification where we seek some unified sense of ourselves through symbolic systems and identify with the ways in which we are seen by others" (Woodward 1997: 45). What occurs is that an awareness of self is sought *outside* the self. In the case of black identities, history, economy, sexuality, and pigmentation combine to contribute to the sense of the black self, which precisely because of these outside influences, is a neurotic state of self-identification, a fractured sense of identity, based on the foremost signifier of difference, a dark skin (Fanon 1986: 154).

How one is perceived is crucial to the process of establishing identities. These perceptions are often intertwined with notions of nationality and ethnicity. In Western societies, the badge of a dark skin is the marker of the formerly enslaved or colonised. James notes the various classifications of race offered by his 'Canadian' students and perceives that, against the "hidden norm of whiteness" (2003: 34), a person of dark skin colour is considered African, not specifically Senegalese or South African, but African, as an all-encompassing descriptor.

At present the assumption that a person with dark skin originated from Africa may be correct in some way; however, it may not be correct to assume that the person considers him/herself 'African', as markers of nationality (passports) and country of origin, may not conform to the politically-motivated ideological construct of being 'African'. The identity 'African' may thus involve a conscious political choice.

James's 'Canadian' students classified races against a "hidden norm of whiteness", which suggests that a covert racist ideology informed their assigning of identities to the 'non-white'. Kumar states that, once firmly established, "a racist ideology will operate with a built in 'self-fulfilling prophecy'" (in Cohn-Sherbok 1987: 49).

In South Africa, one notes the particular roles assigned to 'race groupings' within society as examples of 'self-fulfilling' stereotypes: the white businessman, the Indian shop owner, the black athlete, the coloured fisherman. It may be possible, as Pickering argues, to attribute such stereotypical thinking to an aspect of social Darwinism which hypothesizes that Western European nations have attained the peak of evolutionary development, whilst primitive societies, in Africa or Australia, have remained at its nadir (2001: 54). In contemporary South African culture, violence, burglary, rapes, and high rates of HIV-AIDS infection are taken to be normative traits of the black community.

The corporeal signifier, the black skin, clearly plays a part in shaping black identity and the realisation of this can be a rude awakening. As Marechera states: "I had never really come to terms, I suppose, with my blackness – it was something of a shock to realise that my skin for the English was a natural label that read Mugger, Rapist, Amin, Inferior" (1992: 106). In this case, an identity or a series of identities are attributed to blackness through the acknowledgement of stereotypes on violence, crime, and sexuality. Marechera is made to acknowledge these labels or stereotypes as part of an operational black identity that is a universal construct. As hooks points out too, such stereotyping occurs globally, especially when associated with blackness and, more importantly, black masculinity (2004: 146).

Marechera's realization of the 'natural label' of his blackness forces him to locate his own identity within the history of the signifier (e.g. Amin). Marechera's process of self-identification is clarified by Fanon, who describes this kind of identity formation as a realisation of being "responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave ships, and above all else, above all: 'Sho' good eatin'" (1986: 112).

The words 'battered down' suggest subjugation and coercion in the process of forming black identities, which, as Fanon notes, results in feelings of loss within blackness, in which black people require "white approval" (1986: 51), in respect of the perceived cultural superiority attributed to whiteness. Marechera's realisation of

identity reflects discourses on subjective independence or agency, within the process of identity formation. Both Marechera and Fanon look at themselves critically ('I subjected myself to an objective examination' remarks Fanon) and, instead of choosing not to engage with the stereotypes which are associated with blackness, they feel overwhelmed by the histories of black identities already created. The point at which Fanon and hooks (among other writers on *other* culture) meet, is the realisation that white supremacy dictates the difference blackness poses, and this difference is based on a perceived state of 'lack' from the point of view of both the subjugator and the subjugated.

Constructs of the *other*, perceptions of blackness from the outside and the history of the signifier 'black' clearly contribute to the formation of black identities. Gooding-Williams (in Taylor 2004: 112) makes a distinction between being a black person and being black, in the way in which one could make a distinction between being homosexual and being gay. Blackness and homosexuality have their discursive histories which bear upon the identity-formation of the black or homosexual, but 'being black' or 'gay' involves choice. 'Being black' is rooted in claiming a functioning black identity in preference to the histories of a corporeal signifier.

2.4. INTERNALISATION AND BLACK IDENTITY

The internalisation of various stereotypes of black identity is a subject that Fanon (1986) explores from a psychoanalytic perspective. hooks (1995a, 1995b) develops this discourse from black feminist perspectives on *othering*. For writers such as wa Thiong'o and Achebe, language is clearly at the heart of postcolonial discourse and continues to manufacture the codes by which the discourse can and does take place.

During maintains that "the question of language for postcolonialism is political, cultural and literary... in the material sense that a choice of language is a choice of identity" (1995: 125-126). The awareness that a choice of language is a choice of identity ensures that postcolonial discourse is rooted in the discovery of new structures of language which do not reflect the patriarchal binaries of colonial hierarchies.

Like language, art is also bound by the ideology governing it and also requires a renegotiating of spaces and agencies for there to be a functional postcolonial discourse that does not echo hierarchical thinking. Clearly, postcolonial discourse can provide a space in which identity and, in particular, internalisation of identities, can be explored. Internalisation in this sense means constructing one's subjectivity within the various forms of language, art-forms and cultural practices which retain, reinforce and perpetuate stereotypical versions of blackness.

In the case of blackness, black identity is linked inextricably to the experience of blackness located within a particular history. In reflecting on his identity, Archbishop Tutu states that "when I looked inside me and saw this man made--caricature I bridled with anger and hatred and contempt of this false self. I then projected it outwards to those who outwardly looked like me. Before my superior white overlords I quaked with demeaning obsequiousness and, before those who looked like the thing I hated and despised, I was harsh and abrasive" (2006: 10).

In these words, Tutu conveys the internalisation of a black identity entrenched in the history of apartheid. 'Man-made caricature' and 'false self' illustrate the kind of black identity created by white discourses of blackness: Tutu learns to hate his blackness and that of others, precisely because he has internalised white loathing. This is the process Fanon (1986) explores in depth, arguing that the machinations of a system of dominance (like *apartheid*) locate superiority/inferiority within the corporeal signifier, internalising or 'normalising' "corporeal malediction" (Gibson 2003: 26).

Tutu's words perfectly exemplify the 'malediction' of the black body, which he expresses publicly in a weekend newspaper in the language of a former colonial power. He thus reflects on the process of identity formation in the colonial period in a post-colonial context in language which he has appropriated. Tutu thus positions himself in the wider context of post-colonial discourse because he is now free of the subjugating political and social structures which defined his identity. He now has the space to re-negotiate his identity and acknowledge his *misrecognized* sense of his own blackness (to return to Lacan).

2.5. SUBJUGATING STRUCTURES: THE GAZE AND THE GALLERY SPACE.

If the choice of language is a choice of identity, so too with art and the space one chooses in which to display it. Art (like language) is determined by the ideological boundaries of a hierarchical system of value constructed in answer to the questions 'Is it art? How should we classify it? Where should we display it?'

According to Lidchi, "a Foucauldian interpretation of exhibiting would state that ethnographic objects are defined and classified according to the frameworks of knowledge that allow them to be understood" (1997: 191). I have expanded this idea of the museum space to include what is known as the gallery space, as both museological display and aesthetic display operate within similar 'discursive formations' (ibid). Needless to say the blurring of the lines between ethnographic representation and aesthetics is located in representation of the *other* (Hall 1997c: 225). What is significant is the location of power within the structures of display and how this affects the representation of difference.

In contemporary studies of art theory (Golden 1994, hooks 1995a, Hall 1997, Atkinson 1999), what has come to be known as the "gaze" has resulted in close scrutiny of the roles played by the viewer of a subject and the subject being portrayed. The act of looking or observing creates a dynamic in which a hierarchy of power exists, where the character doing the observing is, more often than not, in control of the subject being viewed, although, in the case of the contemporary photographic subject, power roles can be subverted.

In the case of racial and gender subjugation as a result of the gaze, the subject (e.g. a female nude, a male nude, a child, a black male) is at the mercy of whatever fantasies, beliefs and ideas might be in the mind of the viewer and what ideology or myth underpins these beliefs. Barthes (in Hall 1997b: 39) argues that it is at this point that readership, or what the reader brings to the image, informs the 'true' meaning of the work. For instance, can one view an image of a black man, or present oneself as

a black man as subject, in a South African gallery, without locating the image in predetermined notions of difference, hegemony and gendered objectification?

In the case of the representation of black males in westernised gallery space, the space itself and the subjugating structures impact on the degree of agency afforded to the subject. The gaze can be manipulated with regards to meaning and an interaction between the viewer and the viewed. However, is the gaze that views a work by African American artist Lyle Ashton Harris in New York functioning in the same way as the gaze viewing the work of South African artist Thando Mama at the Tatham Art Gallery in Pietermaritzburg? Do the same stereotypes of blackness come into operation regardless of the different subjectivities that these artists may present?

It seems likely that, within the construct that is the gallery space, display of non-western culture will always be the stereotypical *other* for, as Hall points out, to venture into the gallery space is to engage in the discourses of opposition and hegemony (1997b: 56). The gaze is located in the construct that is the gallery space, a structure that reinforces white supremacist ideology by perpetuating the act of colonizing, appropriation and ownership.

In attempting to understand how the gaze and the gallery work as subjugating structures, it has become apparent that discourses of power are relevant to the understanding or interpretation of perceptions of *other*, and perhaps this will clarify how the black body is *othered*. The white heterosexual male's hegemonic form of masculinity derives its power not only from the denigration of the *other*, but also from the construction of an ideal *other*.

2.6. THE BLACK MALE BODY: THE 'IDEAL' *OTHER*

In determining what the *other* is, there are also means by which the *other* can be fixed into an *ideal other*, a binary opposite constructed to serve a purpose.

Derrida has argued persuasively that "there are few neutral binary oppositions. One pole of the binary… is usually the dominant one, the one that includes the *other* in its field of operations" (in Hall 1997c: 235) (*italics inserted*). If this is the case then a

power relationship based on the historical imbalance of power between the binary of blackness and whiteness has resulted in the creation of an ideal *other*, consistent and ever representative of alterity within discourses of difference.

In the following section, I will focus on specific examples of *othering* and perceived attributes of blackness (and black masculinity) which were 'definitive' markers of alterity in the construction of the ideal *other*. As Fanon (1986) has suggested that the primary signifier of alterity is a dark skin, I would like to locate the exploration of the ideal *other* in the racialization of the black male. In many ways the effective stereotypes result in a homogenizing, in this case, of black masculinity and black physicality, resulting in a 'universal' construct of black men as *other*, as sexual, aggressive, unintelligent, and athletic. An examination of the prevalence of stereotype in contemporary media and art, particularly current television, cinema and advertising, reveals an "essentialising of gender and race" (Kimmel 2005: 274), which is particularly true of black males.

Sexually based stereotypes (the hypermasculine, oversexed black male with the enormous phallus) seem to be the most common within the representation of the black male in contemporary art and, as resident in the biological, they reflect Fanon's perceptions of the corporeal as an overriding indicator of difference. In reference to the eroticised and exoticised black body, Root states that "the exotic is often marked through sexuality or, rather, is made to represent a certain kind of sexual encounter to the extent that stories of Europeans going to foreign countries and having sex with attractive natives have become a constant and persistent cliché of film and literature" (1996: 177).

hooks expresses this similarly: "undoubtedly, sexuality has been the site of many a black male's fall from grace...this is in part because of the convergence of racist, sexist thinking about the black body, which has always projected onto the black body a hypersexuality" (2004: 67). The origins of the notion of a subordinate or deviant sexuality can be found in the manuscripts of early European travellers who testified to the heightened sexuality of Africans as a result of the perceived similarities between the black 'race' and primates. Pieterse records the following comment: "[The Negro's] (*sic*) faculties of smell are truly bestial, nor less their commerce with

the other sexes; in these acts they are libidinous and shameless as monkeys, or baboons" (1992: 41).

Monkey-talk has long since been a feature of white South African racist discourse. A representational example of this is a South African postcard dated 1920 entitled <u>Luke the baboon boy</u> (see **Plate 12**). The postcard depicts an adult black male smiling at the viewer. The text accompanying the image recounts the narrative of 'Luke' who was stolen from his parents and raised by a troop of baboons. He was found by policemen and then handed over to a farmer in the Port Alfred district who trained him to become a "useful farm hand" (Pieterse 1992:42). The postcard thus situates the image within Darwinian evolutionary 'science' and confirms the assumed scientifically proven subhuman nature of a black male, easily mistaken by a troop of baboons for one of their own.

Secondly, 'Luke' represents the lack of intelligence, 'natural carnality' and physicality attributed to blackness, as he is subject to animalistic drives that have to be trained out of him, a sentiment echoed in such colonial domestic enterprises that still occur at present as 'hiring a garden boy and showing him how to work in the garden' or 'training the maid'. 'Luke the baboon boy' is also the eternal child: the adult black male smiling at the viewer has the childlike naïveté of the 'noble savage', never quite attaining the age of reason.

The ideal *other* is thus an eternal child, close to nature and the paradise of a golden age. But what happens when the child grows up and acquires his fabled penis? The ideal other then becomes a dangerous predator. hooks notes that "within neo-colonialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, the black male body continues to be perceived as the embodiment of bestial, violent, penis-as-weapon, hyper-masculine assertion" (1995a: 205).

As we have seen in chapter one, the visual arts and ethnographic or anthropological studies from the colonial period often portrayed black males in close proximity to wild animals such as chimpanzees, horses or livestock, in an attempt to relate the 'closeness' of their 'bestial qualities' to other animals (see **Plate 13**). An example of text that accompanied such illustrations is: "Negro Boy and Apes. On the left side of

the figure there is a young Chimpanzee and on the right side a young Orang-utan" (Pieterse 1992: 42). Clearly the 'negro boy' is being situated on an evolutionary ladder which suggests that he belongs with the bestial rather than the human.

This method of comparison has a lasting echo in the representation of black males in art, creating and perpetuating the myth of black male physical prowess and insatiable sexual appetites, particularly in the depiction of the black male nude or the black athlete. Black male sexuality provided a site onto which "Euro-Americans" and white colonialists in southern Africa "seeking to leave behind a history of their brutal torture, rape and enslavement of black bodies" (hooks 2004: 67) could project their fears. Constructing black masculinity in this way did not occur in isolation, but in relation to other patriarchal gender constructs, such as different versions of femininity, ranging from the hegemonic variety to subordinate variants.

As Taylor perceptively comments, "true femininity, which is to say beauty, delicacy, and desirability to men, became a trait that only white women could possess. Which led to several interlocking quasi-feminine myths like those of the hot-blooded Latina, the Asian dragon lady, and the sexually voracious hyper-fertile black woman. But it also fuelled the mythology of the black male rapist, lusting after white women" (2004: 66). The structure of these stereotypical gender constructs suggests a hierarchy with white masculinity and femininity at the apex; to maintain its hegemony, these gender positions have to create and sustain myths (and, of course, stereotypes) about the *other* subordinate gender positions.

The myth of the 'sexually voracious hyper-fertile black woman', deployed in the service of white patriarchal ideology, was illustrated in the last chapter with the "Hottentot Venus", Saartje Baartman, whose buttocks and genitalia were examined by doctors and scientists, eager to make connections between black female sexual prowess, physiognomy and the criminal element in prostitution. Baartman's tragic case is a perfect example of the construction of the ideal *other* in a museum space.

The myth of the 'black male rapist' is directly connected to another and perhaps more damaging stereotype, that of the black phallus, and the association of the phallus as *the* embodiment of black male *otherness*. Pieterse notes how white supremacist

ideologies historically located the *otherness* of the black male in the phallus. He notes that "the myth of the large penis had a history... Mandingo (sic) men according to Richard Jobson in 1623, were 'furnisht with such members as are after a sort burthensome unto them'". Later he comments: "the black man as 'walking phallus' and 'super stud' was both sexualised and made taboo and was thus promoted to being America's fearsome sex symbol" (1992: 175).

As a result, in the U.S.A., until the Civil Rights Movement in the early 1960s, several violent acts, such as lynching, were carried out against black males which exacerbated the phallic status of black masculinity as a stereotype. The perception of black masculinity and sexuality as subordinate in relation to white patriarchal masculinity became more and more important. To achieve this, contradictory myths about black male sexuality were propagated. On the one hand, the stereotype of the black male rapist with the huge phallus; on the other the castrated black male, feminized into submission. As hooks explains: "after slavery ended, black men were constructed as feminine by white supremacist rhetoric that insisted on depicting the black male as symbolically castrated, a female eunuch" (1995a: 206). Child, rapist, female eunuch: if these are the ways in which black masculine identities are being constructed by white identity discourses, it is no wonder that this form of 'plantation patriarchy' (hooks 2004:1) has created a crisis in black gender and race identity.

From Fanon's perspective, gender and sexuality are intersecting constructs, implicated in 'race' and an internalised perception of inferiority. He recalls that in conversations with several Antilleans he found "the dominant concern with those arriving in France was to go to bed with a white woman in order to be initiated into 'authentic manhood'" (1986: 72). 'Authentic' masculine identity is thus associated with sex with a white woman, as sex with a black woman would be 'inauthentic'. These comments reveal the internalised sense of inferiority in black males, derived from white perceptions of black culture and sexuality as subordinate, which simply reaffirm the myth of the black rapist and the hypersexual black male. With the concept of the patriarchal white masculine serving as the dominant pole in the binary relationship (see Derrida's comments in Hall 1997c: 235), the black masculine is the subordinate *other* within patriarchal discourse. From Fanon's psycho-analytic perspective, perhaps the *other* could be conceived of as a Jungian collective

resonance of the "darkness inherent in every ego, of the uncivilised savage, the Negro who slumbers in every white man" (1986: 187).

In the following section, I will examine the artwork of Mapplethorpe and Makhoba, as representations of the black male *other*, either confirming or challenging the myths and stereotypes explored above.

2.7. MAKHOBA AND MAPPLETHORPE

In examining the role of the black male as an ideal *other*, two prominent ways of constructing the black male are evident in visual representation. One deploys stereotype to effect a fixed definition of blackness as virile, dangerous, lustful, unintelligent, primitive and bestial, whereas the other construct locates the black body in the erotic and exoticised.

Both constructs have become popularised in contemporary media and in the visual arts, shaping the representation and self-representation of black males, whether one is watching a music video or advert or gazing at a photograph in a gallery. Within the South African visual arts, Trevor Makhoba's work has particular resonance, as many of his works represent the black male as *other*.

Makhoba's work entitled Great Temptation in the Garden (1995) (see **Plate 14**) confronts the *otherness* and fear of black male sexuality within white supremacist discourse. The image explores the perceived threat of black male sexuality in much the same way as Fanon interrogates the intersections of gender and race in the process of *othering*.

The image is located in the tradition of depictions or cartoons showing black male/white female relations as popularised in France in the early 1900s. Of this imagery, Pieterse writes: "most of them concern black man/white woman situations in which the black man is almost invariably depicted as grotesque (swollen lips, sweet as chocolate, primitive barbarian, colossal brute, or dandy) and usually in a position socially or physically inferior to that of the woman" (1992: 184).

Another discourse in which Makhoba's Temptation is located is the Judeo-Christian myth of the Garden of Eden, in which the narrative is rooted in patriarchal and masculinist ideology: i.e. a female protagonist of the 'original sin'. In his painting, Makhoba reflects upon the tradition of the Garden of Eden, but complicates the role of the protagonist by evoking discourses of race, gender, social class and sexuality.

In the painting, a black labourer or "garden boy" in the foreground works in the garden with a trowel, under the watchful eyes of a white woman. She crouches next to him offering him a cup of tea. However, in the act of doing so, she crouches in a manner which reveals her genital area covered in red briefs to him, almost as an open invitation, a forbidden fruit dangled before the black Adam. This invitation is emphasised by her wide grin, emphasised by her bright red lipstick. Behind her is a large excited male Doberman/Rottweiler.

The complex juxtaposition of these three elements evokes the stereotypes and myths discussed previously. The inclusion of the dog in the painting suggests the aforementioned stereotype of the animalistic "brute nigger (virile to the point of bestiality)" (Pieterse 1992: 178), and the black male 'gardener' who tames nature (in accordance with his white madam's instructions) evokes the stereotype of the primitive, lustful black male, whose 'true' nature will erupt if left untamed.

Another possible reason for the inclusion of the dog in the image is that it is intended to protect the white woman, as she ventures out to interact with the black 'garden boy', in the place of the watchful eye of the white male patriarch absent from the image. The positioning of the woman's hands, as she crouches in front of the gardener, suggests sexual invitation. In her left hand, she holds a bottle of alcohol by the neck. Makhoba has situated the dog in such a way that the neck of the bottle visually substitutes for the Doberman/Rottweiler's genitals, alluding to the potency of animalistic sexual desire embodied by the dog *and* the black male.

The bottle of alcohol and an empty glass also present in the image suggest that the white woman's invitation is artificially induced: she would not extend this sexual temptation without the aid of alcohol. Eve succumbs to temptation in the Garden of

Eden; similarly, in the painting, the woman is the one tempted by devilish black promise.

However, the perceived vulnerability of the woman locates power within the black male, and an audience, informed by white supremacist patriarchal ideology, would expect the black male to fulfil his brutish tendencies and 'rape' the woman. Rooted in the stereotype of the black rapist, the black male Makhoba presents to us is fraught with contradiction. One could suggest that Makhoba is cleverly parodying white discourses of black masculinity and satirising them. Makhoba may well have intended this, if one notes his self-perceived role as social commentator in his other works---It's Dad, Mum, Dogs on duty (see **Plate 15**)and Inguyazana –Caucus(1995).

However, in the context of the endless, anxious discourse about security in South Africa and the overwhelmingly depressing rape statistics, the woman's role as the protagonist is diminished by the potential and expected action of the black rapist. Makhoba may well be satirising stereotypes of black masculinity, especially within colonial ideology, but the context, the gaze and the gallery space do not encourage a satirical reading of the images.

Makhoba's painting connotes the perceived carnal fascination that black males (and their mythical equipment) hold for white females, but also interrogates the exoticised European, colonial fascination with black sexuality. The white male, not present in Makhoba's painting, is assumed to be playing the role of the absent breadwinner and provider, maintaining a stable domestic lifestyle, with his wife remaining at home as 'lady of the house'. The house in the background is a symbol of how successfully these roles are maintained and unquestioned, as firmly established, dominant structures. However these roles are now threatened by another, subordinate masculinity. The absence of the white male increases the vulnerability of the white female to the ever-ready, hyper-sexuality of the black male; however, despite the supposed power of the black male in the image, he is still a 'garden boy' and his social position does not have any *visible* power over the situation, save the associations of his skin, a corporeal signifier, with sexuality and raw physicality.

The power dynamic revealed in the painting is also an echo of Fanon (1986: 72) and his example of Antillean new arrivals in France and their search for 'authentic manhood'. In the case of an impoverished gardener, faced with the possibility of participating in an empowering patriarchal act of domination, a sexual act, as Kimmel states, may fulfil the "fantasy" of attaining the "unattainable" (in hooks 2004: 72).

What of the gaze within the gallery space? Makhoba's work has been viewed primarily within the context of gallery spaces in South Africa. His work, viewed by a mixed audience, black and white, male and female, would have resulted in multifaceted readings which are worthy of speculation.

How would a South African black male of equal *and* dissimilar social standing to the 'gardener' react to such an image? How might a white male react to the presentation of white femininity in the fashion that Makhoba has chosen to interpret it? Would the image confirm and exacerbate the stereotype of the lust for the exotic inherent in the white feminine?

A white male gaze, shaped by supremacist ideology, may well express fear, as the white woman 'lowers' herself to the level of a subordinate being. In the act of propositioning the black male, the white woman is rejecting the establishment white patriarchal power by literally turning her back on the house. The act of leaving the establishment to pursue a sexual encounter in the 'natural' garden makes one wonder how the image may have been interpreted, if the drama had been unfolding within the house, in the kitchen or bedroom.

In the image, white supremacist patriarchy exists as an ever-present but 'invisible' facet of the reality presented, constructing the identities of the white woman and the gardener. The white supremacist hetero-patriarchal gaze renders the black male and the white female homogenous indicators of concepts fixed, as Bhabha notes, "in the ideological construction of *otherness*" (Mercer 1997: 287) (*italics inserted*).

Fear, in a black male viewer, may reside in the internalising processes of self-derision, or neurotic dislocation from self experienced by Fanon, confirming the

inferior status of self in the face of hegemony. Furthermore the close association of white femininity and black masculinity in the image confirms the stereotypic perception of black masculinity within the socio-cultural as feminine.

Thus far the focus on *othering* has been on South African work. In the following section, I examine the eroticisation of the black male body in the work of Robert Mapplethorpe, a gay American artist, who took numerous photographs of black male bodies which were exhibited in galleries internationally and subsequently published in two texts.

The significance of Mapplethorpe's work to this part of the dissertation is in the exploration of stereotypical and fetishistic visions of blackness and portrayals of the black male body as a homogenised entity, reflecting the "voyeuristic fantasy of unmediated unilateral control of the *other*" (ibid.) (*italics inserted*). Mercer posits that such images reflect colonial patriarchal classification of the black *other* as feminine, creating a fetishized, objectified and erotic terrain for domination.

In this way, the physicality and sexuality of the black male is perceived as a usable commodity, a passive object open to the (homo)erotic gaze of the white male imagination. Fetishism in representation involves, as Hall argues, "the substitution of an 'object' for some dangerous and powerful but forbidden force… it also involves displacement" (1997c: 266). In the case of the images created by Mapplethorpe, each image can be read as embodiments of the stereotype which equates black masculinity with the phallus.

According to Fanon, "one is no longer aware of a Negro but only of a penis; the Negro is eclipsed. He is turned into a penis. He is a penis" (1986: 170). This is a return to the concept of the black male *other* as phallus, but not as the enraged beast driven by insatiable lust and bestial urges, but rather the repressed object of erotic desire, created by white supremacist and colonial discourse, in which the depiction of *other* sexuality functions as fetish. Of Mapplethorpe's images, Mercer perceptively writes that they are "aestheticized as a trap for the gaze providing the pabulum on which the appetite of the imperial eye may feed…"; Mercer continues to claim, rightly in my opinion, that "each image thus nourishes the racialized and sexualised

fantasy of appropriating *Other's* (sic) body as virgin territory to be penetrated and possessed by an all-powerful desire, to probe and explore an alien body" (1997: 287) (*italics inserted*). Doy offers similar analyses of Mapplethorpe's work (2000: 156).

Mapplethorpe created many works which border on what some might consider pornography, using his camera to focus the viewers' attention on an essentialised portrayal of black masculinity. Works such as Ajitto 1980, Ken Moody 1983, and Man in Polyester Suit 1980 (see **Plates 16, 17, 18**) all seem to reflect exoticism and fetishism.

In the first example, Ajitto, the male figure is set in a seated classical pose with his head between his raised knees. His hands are linked together in front of him. This could be read as a beautiful replication of classical sculpture. However, what many readers may not realise is that besides being 'given' a name, the figure is no more than a faceless object devoid of personality or history. The identity of the man in the photograph is unclear, but from the angle of a profile it is revealed that his genitalia are more of a mark of racial identity than his skin colour.

The homoerotic elements contained within several of Mapplethorpe's works generate tension between the heterosexual gaze and the concept of white superiority. The subject in the work is completely passive while the viewer looks on. White males are now being confronted with the sexuality of the black male up-front and are asked to recognise a form of beauty; however, these works do nothing more than re-enforce the already existing stereotypes about black men.

We have the representation of an "object of beauty" in a work like Ajitto, whereas in works like Ken Moody, the viewer is presented with the back of a bald man standing with his arms held in front of him, giving the impression of an 'armless' body. Moody wears nothing but a dark, thong-like loincloth. The disturbingly 'exciting' nature of the photograph suggests the fetish. This constructed reality disables the subject physically. He has 'no arms' and bares his back to us, leaving him at the mercy of the viewer's gaze.

White supremacist ideology and constructs of blackness are more apparent in this example. <u>Ken Moody</u> is not so much an object of beauty, but someone who is actively intriguing and inviting. The viewer is in total control of what is seen but, at the same time, is asked to indulge in the quasi-sadomasochistic fantasy of being a voyeur or even a 'punisher'.

The final example refers to the brutishness and savage sexuality of black males. <u>Man in Polyester Suit</u> recalls the construct of the 'Dark Continent' and all the stereotypes associated with it. The hidden secrets of the black male physique (like the penetrated hinterland of Africa) are revealed to be all that can be expected. In a sense the work appears to state, "Everything you ever heard about black men... is true!" (Pieterse 1992: 175). The work shows the midriff of an adult black male who stands, clad in a suit, with his jacket partially open. The only signs of the model's black masculinity are his hands that hang loosely by his sides and his exposed penis that protrudes from an unfastened zipper in his trousers.

Despite the voyeurism, which borders on pornography, Mapplethorpe blatantly charges this piece with the tradition of a stereotype that fuels the white male anxiety of dealing with the sexuality of the *other*. Notions of the raw and the primal, which governed the perceptions of early colonials, (that is, the bestial nature of black sexuality) are fulfilled and confirmed in a work such as this.

In other works, Mapplethorpe refers to the classical ideal, photographing the black male individually in a formal studio environment. In some cases, Mapplethorpe presents the subject on a pedestal or in a contained structure, a hollow pipe or box, referring again to the classical tradition of still life or portraiture.

Appreciation for the search for the ideal in Mapplethorpe's work is expressed by Mirzoeff, who states that "unlike Leonardo's anonymous figure (in reference to the Vitruvian Man), with its vague analogy to Jesus, Mapplethorpe depicted a known African-American man as the Ideal. By posing this challenge to Classical perfection, Mapplethorpe reclaimed the male nude as overtly homoerotic and defied the Western convention that whiteness represented perfection" (1995: 195) *brackets inserted.*

Golden echoes these sentiments with the comment that "undoubtedly Black Book contains some of the most beautiful images of black men ever taken" (1994: 33).

However, hooks identifies the images as problematic, correctly, in my opinion. She acknowledges that Mapplethorpe's photographs are technically masterful, but she states that "the danger embedded in the images these two artists (Mapplethorpe and his predecessor Dureau), have popularised, lies not so much in the perpetuation of obvious racist stereotypes that they exploit and reify, but in the manner in which public response privileges this work and thereby subordinates all other image making of the black male body, both by insisting that it reference or mirror this work and by continually foregrounding these images in ways that erase and exclude more compelling oppositional representations" (1995a: 210) *brackets inserted.*

hooks thus challenges Mirzoeff's perception in the interrogation of "perfection", which reveals the pervasive nature of white supremacist fascination with a colonising schema that homogenises the black *other*. The systematic objectification of the black male body in Mapplethorpe's images raises the question of subjectivity and agency which will be discussed at length in the following chapter.

2.8. SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 2

In chapter two, subjugation and the mechanisms by which subjugation occurs have been explored with a focus on racist ideology. In addition to this, particular examples of stereotypical and racist ideologies have been foregrounded with direct reference to artworks.

Of importance has been the process of internalisation of white supremacist discourse by black men and women reinforcing the concept of an ideal *other*. Internalisation of a white supremacist discourse by *other* manifests itself in a variety of ways, such as self-hatred and self-denial, and has a very real face within contemporary black culture, dictating the degree of agency black people have in negotiating their identities. Hair straighteners and skin lightening creams are only at the surface of a culture internalising discourses of white perceptions of blackness. hooks identifies

this problem in her essay 'whiteness in the black imagination' (1995: 31) which is strongly influenced by Fanon's work (1986).

It is the acceptance of *otherness* through passivity, within the discourse of white supremacy, that white hegemony is legitimised as 'natural' and stereotypes of blackness confirmed. In the following chapter, the importance of agency in the establishment of a functional identity, separate from dominance and subjugation, will be discussed.

CHAPTER 3

"It is in representing elements of the self, which are considered the 'other' by dominant systems of representation, that an act of reclaiming, empowerment and self-definition occurs" (Parmar in Doy 2000: 144).

3.1. INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, matters of agency and subjectivity were raised as possible strategies to counter the effects of subjugation and stereotype on the construction of black identities. This final chapter will continue with the debate on identity, race and difference and will focus on agency and the role of the subject in the making and display of art. As Parmar has stated above, the representation of self can be a step towards reclaiming and re-establishing subjectivity and agency and, with this statement in mind, I will explore, in this chapter, examples of agency and subjectivity in selected contemporary art by black artists.

In previous chapters, I have analysed discourses of ideology, power and race in order to interrogate, from a post-structuralist perspective, the concept of *othering*. The focus now shifts in this chapter to the question of whether agency and subjectivity are feasible for the black artist within a poststructuralist discourse around the visual arts, as an alternative to the visual discourses that reflect colonial structures of hierarchy and domination discussed in chapters one and two.

This is not as plain as it seems, as poststructuralist theory (e.g., Mama 1995, Weedon 1997, Woodward 2002) has relegated the notion of a unified subject and singular self to naive essentialism and declared it a fiction. If the unified, humanist subject is dead, how does one conceive of subjectivity in poststructuralist theory?

Mama, who positions herself as a poststructuralist theorist and believes that "describing and sharing experience…will not be enough to transform our oppressive social relations" (1995:14) defines discourses, in the Foucauldian sense, as "historically constructed regimes of knowledge" or shared grids of knowledge which "one or more people can 'enter' (sic) and through which explicit and implicit

meanings are shared" (1995: 98). Subjectivity is thus the means by which discourses can be interpreted through the individuals' relationship to the social. Doy agrees with Mama's notion that subjectivity is "a process of constitution and movement through already constituted positions" (2000: 141), but suggests that one could extend this inquiry beyond the purely theoretical by using actual examples of artworks that support and question the relationship of the individual to society, without resorting to essentialist perceptions of self and subject.

Doy posits that the agency and subjectivity of artists and their artwork is located in experience that should not be perceived as passive as it has a functional place in discourse. The difficulty in Mama's statement resides in the interpretation of 'already constituted positions' which implies that a key component to discourse is the fixity or certainty in all states of subject/object relations defining the subjective role---a kind of discursive determinism, moulding subjectivities. However, Doy emphasises the importance of lived experience in the construction of subjectivity and argues that this is both "passive and active with the balance of these tensions changing at different times" (2000: 141). There is thus in the notion of Doy's 'lived experience' a subject position not entirely discursively determined.

Clarity on this issue of 'lived experience' may be found in examining the artist as an example of an individual's relationship to the social. As hooks states "writing art, making art is not the same as being the subject of art" (1995a: 135) and it is important that in the examples that are discussed below the experience or expressed intention of the artist is taken into account, as this may provide a further step towards understanding black subjectivity in relation to how black art is perceived socially.

How black art is perceived socially raises the thorny question of representation. Of Hall's three theories of representation (1997b: 24-25), the mimetic, the intentional and constructionist approaches, the latter two are perhaps the most useful for the exploration of possible black subjectivities. The intentional approach to representation and its location in language and meaning is useful for interpreting individual experience. The constructionist approach to representation enables one to question the subject and the role of the subject in interpreting meaning. I will in this section of this thesis and in line with Doy's position on the subject, attempt to

reconcile the poststructuralist nature of inquiry thus far with selected examples of artworks that explore matters of self and representing the self as black and masculine.

The structure of this chapter is thus as follows:

- **3.2. Exploring self.** This section of the chapter will expound theories that support or argue against the importance of agency and subjectivity as a possible way of interpreting black males/masculinity in art and as artists. This will entail further exploration of the poststructuralist perceptions of identity from Spivak (1995), Hall (1997a), Bhabha (1995b), Weedon (1997) and Woodward (2002). In this section, problems with the idea of selfhood as oppositional discourse will be foregrounded.

- **3.3. Creating self.** This section of the chapter will explore whether effective portrayal of self is actually possible, in the process of seeking out a black identity not subject to structures of dominance and control, but as an independent construct of self. A debate around the importance of subject/object relations will examine the role of experience, individual and social, in the formulation of subjectivity.

- **3.4. Representing self.** This section will explore selected artworks by Voyiya, Harris and Nyoni, which utilise or probe the portrayal of moments of subjectivity, as an effective means of creating discourses resistant to the dominant, hegemonic discourses discussed earlier in the dissertation.

3.2. EXPLORING SELF

Thus far, in this dissertation, I have established the means by which black identity has played the role of *other* through subjugatory processes embedded within the ideology of hegemonic white western supremacist thought. One of the issues central to an exploration of *otherness* in this context is querying an identity alternative to that of *other*. hooks states that this is an ongoing struggle within black masculinity as "black males who refuse categorisation are rare, for the price of visibility in the contemporary world of white supremacy is that black male identity be defined in relation to the stereotype whether by embodying it or seeking to be other than it. At

the centre of the way black male selfhood is constructed in white supremacist capitalist patriarchy is the image of the brute- untamed, uncivilised, unthinking and unfeeling" (2004: xii).

The previous chapter explored representations that not only maintain colonial stereotypes of *other* within the context of visual aesthetics, but have also had great impact on processes of identifying and internalising the perceptions of self *as other*. This chapter explores questions of self-identifying processes and self-representations as discourses directed at creating subjectivities separate from *otherness* and hegemony.

The discourse on identity thus far has shown that ideas of self are dependent on how environmental and external perceptions affect and govern that 'self', a view supported by Mead whose idea of self "does not exist before the process of communication" (in Woodward 2002: 8). In other words the definition of self is located in the interactions and experiences of 'same' and 'different' in our immediate environments. We also must take into account the multiplicity of influences that contribute to this sense of self---language, history, culture, sexuality and 'race'. These factors, amongst many others, influence the construction of selfhood, but yet they remain within the confines of a structured, hegemonic ideology. The construction of self within poststructuralist theory is deeply embedded within these social influences.

With regards to the black male, social identity has been limited to, constructed and internalised as a self-hood that is *otherness* as a result of a colonial, stereotyping, racialising ideology. Where this section of the dissertation then becomes important is in questioning the value of individual agency or subjectivity in light of a system of social identifying strategies, which have shaped and continue to manipulate the construction of black identity as oppositional to hegemonic white capitalist patriarchal supremacy. As hooks notes: "black males who refuse categorisation are rare" (2004: xii). Could this be because any alternative categorisation, let alone the need for categorisation, has been deemed impossible through the lingering restraint of hegemonic white supremacist patriarchal thought and practice? Are there ways in

which black males could 'refuse categorisation' and gain authentic or active agency and subjectivity, particularly within aesthetic paradigms?

Questions such as these expose difficulties in discourses on subjectivity within poststructuralist theory, for the notion of an essential selfhood seems necessary for the forging of 'new' identities, free from hegemonic western discourses. Weedon, in referring to feminist hostility to poststructuralism (and its 'anti-humanism') argues that the "critical deconstruction and contextualization of subjectivity, individual consciousness and experience, arguably necessary to the process of radical political change, is seen as a way of devaluing people" (1997: 71) through the negation of individual experience which, she notes, " is far from homogeneous" (ibid.: 75).

hooks identifies a further complication when considering subjectivity in that taking a resistant stance, for instance, in the face of hegemonic white supremacist patriarchy may involve the renegotiation of power as a dichotomous relationship that perpetuates the idea of homogeneous experience (e.g. black American experience). She illustrates this idea by referring to George Jackson's letters that urged "black males to show their allegiance to the struggle by their willingness to be violent. Paradoxically, by embracing the ethos of violence, Jackson and his militant comrades were not defying imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy; unwittingly they were embracing it" (2004: 50). The assumption of an homogeneous experience (as a uniquely essential 'blackness') may thus legitimize the very ideology it is intended to subvert.

Thus the problem lies in renegotiating subjectivity as a non-binary reaction to the structured dichotomy suggested by roles of powerful and powerless, active and passive, oppressor and subject---notions common to theories of power within liberal humanism. Foucault theorises identity and subjectivity as part of a discourse of power, in which the exchange between dominant and subservient roles is acknowledged "without falling prey to a simple liberal humanism (that is, an assumption that there is a stability to the individual and that each individual is unique)" (Mills 2003: 91). For Foucault there is no powerful and powerless, but we are all embedded in networks of power which are inescapable; in respect of power relationships he argues that "their existence depends on a multiplicity of points of

resistance" which are as he notes "present everywhere in the power network" (1990: 94). Foucault maintains that the key to processes of forging identities resides in the establishment of "counter-discourses" (Mills 2003: 91) which negotiate and play with practices of identification. Importantly, Foucault notes, in reference to constructing positions of counter discourse as resistance, that "it is doubtless the strategic codification of these points of resistance that makes a revolution possible" (1990: 96).

He suggests too that counter-discourses of identity are possible with the reclamation of identifiers and signifiers that may have been negative at the point of origin but, once re-claimed, are used, as Mills notes, "productively to form elements of their own individuality" (2003:91) in a constructionist manner. According to Foucault, the reclamation of signifiers or descriptors, which may have been used derogatorily in the past, could be re-identified and appropriated by those who were subjected to the original insult.

To elucidate, a word like 'queer', though previously associated with a negative stereotype of homosexuality, has now become a signifier of alternative and counter hegemonic discourse. In establishing counter-discourses in this way, it may be possible to see identity formation as flux and based on the exchange between *other* and self.

However, when one examines the matter of identity as linked to or resulting from colonial subjugation, where powerful and powerless are clearly apparent, and the perceived difference is controlled through the establishment of hegemony, the matter of agency and subjectivity needs closer scrutiny. In relation to the reclamation of descriptors with negative connotations, use of the words, nigger, coon and kaffir (referred to in chapter one) still retain powerful resonance within colonial hegemonic ideology in southern Africa and have not been systematically reclaimed within any counter-hegemonic discourse.

Spivak highlights the problematic nature of Foucault's cratology as she notes that "according to Foucault and Deleuze.......the oppressed (the problem of representation cannot be bypassed here), if given the chance and on the way to

solidarity through alliance politics (a Marxist thematic is at work here), *can speak and know their conditions* (sic)" (1995: 25). What Spivak highlights is the manner in which Foucault and Deleuze have assumed that the discourse on power and identity politics is an equalised and 'neutral' zone of interaction, exchange and negotiation, in which powerful and powerless can both recognize where they are trapped in all-encompassing power. In fact what is important is the recognition of other historically-shaped structures such as economics, language, socialised capital and cultural knowledge which also contribute to the construction of identity. Spivak notes that the subaltern cannot simply 'speak' in disregard of all these factors that regulate and control perceptions of subjectivity.

In relation to the subaltern speaking, African subjectivity and the African artist, Oguibe states that autonomy, self-articulation and autography are "contested territories where the contemporary African artist is locked in a struggle against displacement by the numerous strategies of regulation and surveillance that characterize Western attitudes toward African Art today" (2004:13). He continues: "it is enunciation, the ability to reiterate *our* (sic) power over *our* (sic) selves that subjectivizes us. It is this ability and freedom to enounce, too, which precludes us from dominance by others, which takes us beyond the bounds of power" (ibid).

What Oguibe raises is the question of initiating discourses around intention in representation and the means by which the artist could gain *author*ity beyond the bounds or discourses of power (impossible within the Foucauldian concept of power). I wish to return to the concept of going 'beyond discourses of power' later, as at this point the question of self and subjectivity still needs clarification without resorting to an essentialist understanding of selfhood. I recall Mama's position on subjectivity and question the idea that subjectivities are no more than "positions in discourses that are historically generated out of collective experience" (Doy 2000: 141). The interrogation of Mama's position, which excludes lived experience in favour of a more theoretical approach towards discourse, is in the precarious recognition of the artist as individual and agent in representing experience. The problem occurs in the acknowledgement of, as Doy notes after Foucault, "discourse as practice" where the subject resides as "'subject-in-process', which at any given

moment experiences itself as the 'I', yet there is no real individual lurking behind this fiction of subjectivity" (2000: 143).

Though complicating matters of agency, this concept of the 'subject-in-process', momentarily experiencing itself as the 'I', does make forms of individualism possible within more evolved networks of power (Hall 1997a: 315). As Law notes, "agency, if it is anything, is a precarious achievement" (Woodward 2002: 60) and argues for an understanding of agency that is dependent on various discourses that might contribute to the formation of identity, such as gender and race.

Race as well as gender have been central to the subject of this thesis and have provided a means by which a critical analysis of *other* can be contextualised, but have also revealed these constructs as relationships of power and part of the "government of conduct" (Hall 1997a: 315) that are 'normative', and reflective of dichotomous relationships. With Woodward in mind it could be said that such discourses involving, for example, race and gender, are structures in which agency may be explored, albeit from a precarious position within constructed and already constituted perspectives. These constructs can influence and control the means by which an image may be read, self may be perceived, or agency denied. The following example of an artist working within these constructs illustrates this.

Oguibe describes an interview in which a black artist is unable to deploy his sense of subjectivity and is forced to reckon with constructed perceptions of his identity and his work. He notes that the artist, Ouattara, failed in his effort "to shift the critic's gaze unto his work, to specify the latter as the rightful focus of contemplation, and in so doing, to claim *author*-ity (sic). Clearly against his will, Ouattara finds himself repositioned in the frame as the object" (2004: 12). The black body as artist, as art subject is continually defined within the context of white hegemonic constructions of race and gender discourses, disabling authoritative subjectivity and agency. Ouattara is subject to the operating of these discourses within the framework of hegemony and dichotomy.

An important issue to consider is the renegotiation of these discourses and the power relations inherent to them in order to, after Mead, search for the presentation of "an

empirical self, but one that is reflective, and conscious of the positioning of that self within a broader framework of social relations" (in Woodward 2002: 9). This is somewhat different from the 'subject-in-process' and the momentary, precarious 'I'. The words 'empirical self' suggest an essentialist concept of self, yet one grounded in lived experience; being 'conscious of the positioning of that self within a broader framework of social relations' marries the language of poststructuralist theory and sociology. Could a subjectivity of this kind be possible?

For Doy, the answer is suggested in the investigation of artists exploring their own agency and subjectivity. Whilst he does not intend to equate the meanings of art works with the intentions of the artists, he argues "for the retention of what has been termed a 'modernist' notion of the artist as human subject, riven with contradictory tensions of both individual and social natures, both a product and an agent within a specific social, historical and cultural conjuncture" (2000: 143). What Doy suggests is that there is a possibility for agency and subjectivity within moments of specific discourses, particularly those presented as a dialogue between artist, art work and viewer. In respect of the author and artist as individual and, despite postmodernist and poststructuralist theories hypothesizing non-authorship (Mills 2003: 60), Doy argues for "the importance of the authorial voice for our understanding of black visual culture" (2000: 48). In the case of black masculinity, perhaps the authorial voice may provide a point of origin for counter-discourses that move to undermine, fracture, subvert and eventually discontinue the suppression and homogenisation of black experiences.

The concept of the 'authorial voice' is not that alien to poststructuralist thought. Mills notes that Foucault refers not to the author but rather to the "author-function" in order to make significant the means by which an individual may seek subjectivization (2003: 60), as long as one is constantly self-reflexive about positioning oneself as such. Thus it may be possible to perceive of agency or subjectivities existing as necessary components to the processes of art-making. Gell supports this with his understanding of an artwork or artefact when he states that "any artefact, by virtue of being a manufactured thing, motivates an abduction which specifies the identity of the agent who made or originated it" (1998: 23). The word 'abduction' (with its connotations of 'leading away', 'carrying off' and 'seducing') suggests the identity

discourse initiated by the artist, the artefact, and the viewer's interaction with it. The resultant discourses of ownership, control, and interaction lead to the recognition of potential particular subject positions and identifications, created by the viewer, the artist and the work of art.

Furthermore, if we are to take into account the poststructuralist notion that identity is constantly in process, never arrives and is precariously transient, then the notion of agency is also subject to multiple manifestations. An artist could experience agency as a transient notion of self-identity moving through specific historicities and experiences. In her analysis of feminist poststructuralism, Weedon contends that feminist poststructuralist analysis "is neither concerned with the abandonment of theory nor of subjectivity. It does not argue for relativism, but rather the necessarily always partial, historically specific and interested nature of theory and practice" (1997: 178). Her feminist appropriation of poststructuralism thus argues for the notion of a reflexive subjectivity constantly aware of how it is being positioned and how it positions itself.

This is a very important concept for this dissertation as it makes it possible to locate specific points of agency in discourses on race and gender, taking account of lived experience (Weedon's theory and practice). In this way, black identity can be constructed by artists not as an opposite within binary constructs of *otherness* and domination, but as a mode or strategy of constructing subjectivity within prescribed discourses as a revolutionary dialectic.

How might it be possible for an artist to engage in explorations of subjectivity which "engender oppositional representations" (hooks 1995a: 210) or revolutionary dialectic? The possibility for such engagement may reside in the recognition of lived experience and the embodiment of that experience in visual representation, as part of the wider discourse around object-subject relations. As noted in the last chapter, the 'lived' experience of the black body is one rooted in perceived and constructed notions of blackness associated with the history of subjugation (Fanon 1986, hooks 1995a, 1995b, 2004). The point of reference here is the body as a site of self and the embodiment of subjectivity. Fanon draws attention to the complex interpenetrations between self and the body: being perceived as a racialized body and his perceptions

of embodied self within society (1986: 113). However, the embodied self as artwork raises further problems which I shall discuss in the following sections.

3.3. CREATING SELF

Fanon's acute analysis of the interactions between the black body and perceptions of black subjectivity is an effective starting point for any discussion of the creation of black self or subjectivity. Behrend contends that "the creation of self is a complex process of interaction of multiple practices of identification external or internal to a subject, an elaborate game of mirrors" (2002: 47). In other words, the construction of self as subject (as creator of artistic representation, for instance) or as object (in created work) is the result of the negotiation of perceived experiences of self both from an individual basis, as well as from a social.

The 'game of mirrors' is a striking image: it recalls Lacan's mirror phase in which, from a psycho-analytic point of view, an individual acquires a structure of subjectivity by misrecognizing itself as the *Other*, as the source of meaning and power, but this symbolic order is constituted by the various discourses into which we are 'thrust' as gendered subjects (Weedon 1997: 50). 'A game of mirrors' also suggests an endless pattern of reflections, a shifting series of images, with playful effects. Of self-representation, Behrend notes that, through the recording of self in methods such as in photographic portraiture, "a person can gain various self images which give evidence more of his multiplicity rather than his or her uniqueness" (2002: 48). This echoes the idea, posited by Doy, that agency and subjectivity could exist within moments of specific discourse where self could be presented in various guises, based on the experiences that one wishes to explore and embody as part of that self *at that moment*. Central to this is the idea that creation of self or subjectivity can and does reside within representations of the body.

This is not to say that subjectivity cannot ever reside in non-figurative installation or abstract imagery, but I would like to foreground Taylor's understanding of the phenomenological relationship between humans and their bodies as self, as mentioned in the previous chapter. In relation to conceptual installation and non-figurative, non-representational work, Woodward acknowledges the notion of the

transference of agency to objects and spaces as part of the "actor network theory" (2002: 60) of developing agency. I will return to this point later in the dissertation as the section below is primarily dedicated to the exploration of human agency and the body as self. Pivotal to the interrogation of creating and representing self is a discourse on subject/object relations. I will make use of the photographic medium to contextualise this discourse, particularly as the historical and historicising nature of photography highlights the relational aspects of the medium, both as object-centred, as in the case of ethnographic studies, as well as subject-centred, as in the case of self-portraiture. This hopefully will sharpen our understanding of subject/object relations within visual imagery and representations of *otherness*.

Photography is versatile and immediate and also presents a viewer with a "scientific truth" (Doy 2000: 115), not usually afforded to other disciplines of the visual arts, due to the fact that the reality presented to the viewer is perceived to be an 'accurate' representation of the 'reality' in which he/she exists in the perceived freezing of time, and in the duplication of spatial relationships and colour. I refer particularly to portrait photography which attempts to capture the likeness of an individual as a mirror would and, at the same time, engages the identity and agency of the subject/object being displayed.

To elucidate, a national identity document contains an image of ourselves, a representation of what others perceive ourselves to be and, through the use of text, our nationality, creed, race and gender, as intangible as these concepts may be, become part of the ideological structure that defines our 'reality'. Behrend, referring to Barthes, contends that "the photographic image, because it is a sort of mirror, is the only space in which the photographed person is subject and object at the same time" (2002: 48).

However, insofar as racialized black bodies have been portrayed photographically, even in portraiture, stereotypes have continued to construct the reality of black bodies as more object than subject, for example, photographs of the black body as athlete, thief, art object, sex object, impoverished alien or ideal *other* (as in the work of Mapplethorpe). Contesting such imagery is difficult as the "preferred meaning", as Hall claims (1997c: 228), is embedded or fixed in an ideology based on power that

recognises the subjection of image to the viewers' gaze. A process of negotiation where the roles of subject and object are defined occurs within the space between image, viewer and artwork, which Behrend describes as "a fundamental schism between the subject that perceives and the image that looks back at him" (2002: 48).

A modernist perspective assumes that the artist and the artist's viewpoint mould the viewers' perception of the artwork they are looking at. Ethnographic images of the colonial era provided 'scientific' documentation of the 'natural' world to the colonists, but also fixed meaning into what was (re)presented as object. Furthermore, the perception of object is exacerbated by the nature of photography as a static medium, allowing the viewer agency and ownership of the moment portrayed, as was evident in ethnographic photographs of the colonial era, and the contemporary tendency to appropriate these images as current work, regardless of their point of origin.

Gell formulaically describes this relationship as the "recipient-A – index P" relationship that posits the "elementary formula for 'patronage' and/or 'the spectator as agent". Gell's words "one does not have to lift a finger to feel that one has 'made' something" (1998: 33) convey the ownership or agency, by an artist or spectator, over an already existing entity, which clearly echoes colonial ideology. Thus it is also possible for an artist as 'spectator', through the lens of a camera or the intentional appropriation of an image for whatever purpose, to play a part in the objectification of a subject.

Mapplethorpe suggests this of himself in his approach to photographing the black male body. He asks: "is there any difference in approaching a black man who doesn't have any clothes on and a white man who doesn't have any clothes on? Not really, its form and what you see into that and do with it" (in Doy 2000: 172). The words 'it's form and what you see into that and do with it' clearly imply the conscious objectification of a subject. The relationship thus of spectator/artist and the subject in photography is a good example of the potential for objectification, based on where one is placed, in front of the camera or behind it. This process interrogates the very nature of photography and perhaps other forms of visual representation of the body: are they mechanisms of ideologies that support the notion of an archive, that "play of

rules which determines within a culture the appearance and disappearance of statements" (Foucault in Merquior 1985: 81)?

Bate notes that the "archives are the representations out of which the past is produced in the present" (in Doy 2000: 119). Merquior refers to Foucault's perception of the archive as "a machine generating social – as opposed to linguistic – meaning" (1985:81). As an archaeologist would find layers of information in sedimentary layers of earth and buried structures, the archive is a repository of events, structures, codes and systems of knowledge which can also be peeled away to reveal meanings and contexts that inform the processes of discourse. According to Foucault, the subject is of minimal importance to the functioning of archive.

However, if the archive is located within or viewed as an artwork and is located in the context of the discourses which have shaped it, then, as Doy posits, "we must remember that collections of material from the past are never 'innocent' "(2000: 119). The artwork, as archive, engages with particular discourses, such as those of black identities, gender and sexuality, be they pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial. In the work <u>Patience on the Monument- A History Painting</u> (1988) (see **Plate 19**) the South African artist, Penny Siopis, uses photographs of colonial origin, showing images of unnamed and unspecified black African peoples as collage components to a larger work. Enwezor offers the following critique of Siopis: "by sentimentalising her images, Siopis turns them into over aestheticized vessels for pleasurable consumption, untroubled and available… instead, what we are given is an aesthetic that reveals a curious ambivalence to its subject as a social being, and towards the historical impediments that frame his reception" (2002: 380).

Secondary to this critique is the manner in which Siopis' fragmentary associations of object lead one to locate her appropriation of images that are not of her*self* within Woodward's "actor network theory", which assumes the possibility of agency occurring through the "fragmentation and intertwining of networks" (2002: 60). Woodward states: "Actor network theory breaks down the imaginary barriers between people and things and attributes what we call agency to things, to material culture" (ibid). However, in acting as the archivist-artist, Siopis generates a narrative within the archive that reflects appropriation and hegemony, deflecting redressing

and reshaping the meaning of the elements of her visual vocabulary by locating them in an alternative discourse. The discourse she initiates negates the experience of her sources and defines them as objects to be used for her agency.

Enwezor (2002: 382) locates his argument in the context of interrogating power apparent in the visual arts, informing perceptions of the black body as a site for conquest and ownership by hegemonic white supremacist notions of superiority, through the negation of black experience and bestowing on artists a right to represent. He queries the right of white artists to use the black body or symbols of blackness in their artwork, in order to engage with their agency, thus also drawing on the archive, which defines and produces history. In this way, Enwezor raises the thorny question of the *ethics* of representation of the *other*. Given the history of colonialism and politically legitimised racism in South Africa, the appropriation of the black body by the white gaze immediately situates the artwork within an *unethical* power network of hegemony and subjugation. For, as Oguibe argues, "the imposition of anonymity on the native deletes her claims to subjectivity and works to displace her from normativeness" (2004: 14). Deleting anyone's claims to subjectivity and displacing 'her' from normativeness raises ethical questions: to use the human rights discourse employed by Enwezor, what *right* then does any artist (black or white) have to access an archive, which, in the process, deletes a person's 'claims to subjectivity'? What of the black artist?

For a black artist to draw on the archive, as the means of enabling subjectivity in his/her work, there would have to be, as Doy posits, a "perspective and theory of history which stands outside the archive and assesses it critically, a perspective which is not constructed by the discourse of the archive" (2000: 120). Presumably, Doy sees the archive as a product of Western cultural discourse which the black artist must assess critically from without. In other words, Doy places enormous responsibility on the black artist to be intellectually vigilant at all times, lest s/he be seduced by the discourse of an archive which is not his/her own. The black artist must therefore be alert to the many traps in which his agency could be caught.

Thus far it appears that agency or subjectivity, for the black artist certainly, is dependent on the subject representing self, and not being represented, a point raised

in Enwezor's critique of Siopis' work in which the artist chose to represent *other* as anonymous. As Tutu implies, the creation of self needs to be an active engagement with what he refers to, in rather essentialist mode, as "my God given, utterly precious and unique me" (2006: 10), and its many forms of subjectivity, in order to escape the anonymity of objectification (within an alien archive).

At this point, I would like to recall hooks' statement that "writing art, making art is not the same as being the subject of art" (1995a: 135). With regards to depictions of blackness and black masculinity, 'making art' as the author rather than the authored, acutely aware of the cultural discourses into which one may be situated or may situate oneself, can take place in a manner that interrogates Fanon's "third person consciousness" (1986: 110). I posit that the search for these moments of subjectivity (even if misconstrued as "my God given, utterly precious and unique me") can take place through depictions of the black self as body, the problematically essentialised primary signifier of being, which needs to be reclaimed from the object position to which Western cultural discourse has consigned it. This will become more evident in the following section where black artists and their work in representing themselves becomes the focus of this dissertation.

3.4. REPRESENTING SELF

Rather than focus on a singular view of subjectivity, the 'utterly precious and unique me' approach, I think it is necessary, in the light of the theory discussed in the previous sections, to explore the potential for *subjectivities* in the manner in which black artists convey themselves and their bodies. Reclaiming or redefining black bodies as selves and subjects involves the negotiation of a vocabulary, a space in which the archive can be critically assessed (Doy 2000: 147).

A parallel to the question of negotiating a vocabulary that redefines blackness and black male experience may be seen in Irigaray's view of female sexuality as patriarchal construct. According to Weedon, "Irigaray argues that the otherness of female sexuality has been repressed by patriarchy, which seeks to theorize it within masculine parameters..." furthermore, she "argues that the patriarchal definition of

female sexuality caused women to lose touch with female defined femininity which is located in the female body and its capacity for multiple and heterogeneous pleasure" (1997: 61). Although Irigaray's theory suggests the notion of an essentialised femininity resident within the female body, the crux of the matter is that she argues for the recognition of femininity's subjective voice, freed from patriarchal discourses. To establish this voice, there has to be a kind of essentialism which conceives of the female body and female sexuality as different from that of the patriarchally constructed female body and its sexuality. Furthermore, Weedon notes that "Irigaray argues for an integral relationship between sexuality and language" (ibid.). The *otherness* of female desire, she argues, is the foundation of the *otherness* of female language: male sexuality is concentrated on the phallus and male language is logocentric, whereas the plurality of female sexuality results in the apparent incomprehensibility of female language (Weedon 1997: 61-62). Irigaray's explicit links between biology and identity thus foreground the importance of the empirical and experiential in forging a new subjective voice for women.

One could apply aspects of this theory to representing blackness and black masculinity. Employing or deploying a strategic essentialism of Spivak, rather than the biological essentialism of Irigaray, would perhaps result in the recognition of black experience as located within and outside of the archive, a strategic blackness, which like female sexuality, has unique experiences and specific histories, linked to the corporeal primary signifier of being---'black' skin.

This strategy, according to Spivak, would be a "strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest" (1988: 205). She notes "it is not just that deconstruction cannot found a politics, while other ways can. It is that deconstruction can make founded political programmes more useful by making their in-built problems more visible" 1993: 121). This concept is not unlike the Foucauldian notion mentioned above, of reclaiming, in counter-discourses, signifiers that were rooted in the negative, as demonstrated by strategies of political gay activism which used words like 'queer' to forge new identities. An extension to Foucault's notion of counter-discourse is in Spivak's understanding of subaltern consciousness as "self-consciousness" (1988: 205). In fact Spivak notes Foucault's "construction of a 'counter-memory'" (ibid.) as important to the negotiation of a

'strategic essentialism', but suggests that the strategy is at its most effective apart from any other form of "artificial rallying consciousness"- consciousness based on more "descriptive" and "transformative" factors such as 'class'. Notably it is consciousness of self being subaltern that is at the root of establishing a strategic essentialist stance.

A good example of 'strategic essentialism' deployed as a conscious political strategy is the way in which gay rights activists have used the notion of 'the gay gene' or the 'hormones which make me gay' to counter Christian fundamentalist arguments that homosexuality is unnatural. By deliberately adopting the essentialist stance, which claims that 'gayness is determined by genes and hormones and thus by nature', gay activists can subvert the belief that homosexuality is 'against nature'. In this way, gay activists, who may believe in the social construction of homosexuality, can self-consciously deploy 'strategic essentialism'. Can black artists not adopt a strategy of this kind, by adopting a new vocabulary of blackness?

It is extremely important that, in artworks created by black artists, the integration of the socially perceived self that is located in the historical, and the self that is uniquely experiential are immanent in this new vocabulary of blackness, which is the product of, in hooks' words, the search or recognition of a space/s that allows "subject-to-subject" and not "subject-to-object" relations (1994: 241). Inventing a vocabulary that does not operate within the bounds of hegemonic perceptions of black experience (the archive) would truly enable the subjectivity and agency of a black artist.

In the work discussed below there are examples of how this vocabulary is being forged to assert black identities, which initiate discourses of *not-being-seen-as-other*. To achieve this, the artists attempt to engage with themselves, their agency and subjectivity in non-exploitative ways so as not to perpetuate or reinforce the notion of *other* within the eyes of the spectator. hooks clarifies, very simply, how exchanges between individuals can impact on subjectivity and agency. She states: "I always think that whenever there's the possibility for exploitation, what intervenes is the *recognition of the Other* (sic)… if a person makes a unilateral decision that does not account for *me* (sic), then I feel exploited by that decision because my needs haven't

been considered"(ibid.). She continues: "but if that person is willing to pause, then at that moment of the pause there is an opportunity for *mutual recognition* (sic)... this doesn't necessarily mean the person will change what they intended to do, but it means that (at least temporarily) (sic) I am not rendered an *object*" (ibid.).

The following artworks are, in a sense, pauses for mutual recognition, in which no-one is rendered as an object. Not being rendered as an object entails (as argued previously) exploring constructs of self through experience implying, to use Doy's words, "that there is a position of *embodied* knowledge from which the human subject can criticize ideological stereotypes based on socially structured oppression" (2000: 146) (my italics). Foucault's 'author-function' is also present as an alternative rhetoric of power.

The series of linocuts by South African artist Vuyile Cameron Voyiya, Rhythm in 3/4 time (1988) (see **Plate 20**), is an exploration of the experiences of an individual black male in an environment where he feels persecuted. Voyiya's images are divided into six different panels and within each one a black male is shown. Although Voyiya claims that the subject in his images is based on a man he met in Langa, the figure bears a strong resemblance to the artist himself. He did in fact undergo routine cross-examinations from the police on many occasions. The subject of the work twists from one panel to the next, his eyes alert to an indescribable and indefinable danger. The stark nature of the image, a dramatic play of black and white, is in itself a reminder of the legislation that allowed any black person to be questioned at any time and anywhere, but notoriously at night, when most arrests were made.

Voyiya uses the (his) body of the black male subject as an indicator of the discomfort and unease actually experienced. The subjection felt by the figure in Rhythm is also revealed through the notion of physical entrapment, as the image is frozen in the format in a somewhat candid manner. As with photography, the notion of freezing time as capturing 'reality' is evident in Voyiya's images and the viewer is presented with moments of individual experience.

Crucial to the further interpretation of Voyiya's imagery is that the moment being portrayed does not convey the homogenised black experiences of an oppressive

social legislation or the exoticization of blackness *per se*. The commentary on *apartheid* may be implicated in the discourse Voyiya presents to the viewer, but the subjectivity inherent in the image is located in a specific moment of individual critical engagement, opposing the polarising subject-to-object relations embodied in ethnographic and racialized imagery. Voyiya chooses to engage the viewer in a discourse of violence, persecution, paranoia, race and oppression which does not immediately resort to the stereotypical assumptions and associations of blackness or black masculinity, but still manages to resist these signifiers of *otherness*.

Foucault conceptualises moments of resistance as "the odd term in relations of power; they are inscribed in the latter as the irreducible opposite...hence they too are distributed in irregular fashion" (1990: 96). His concept of 'mobile and transitory points of resistance' which produce "cleavages in a society that shift about, fracturing unities and effecting regroupings and remolding (sic) them" (ibid.) is directly relevant to Voyiya's work which is a 'transitory point of resistance' producing 'cleavages' in the viewer's discourse. Within Foucault's model of power, it will be remembered, it is precisely at these points of resistance that subjectivity or agency is exercised.

Through Voyiya's images, the viewer is able to construct meaning through the instances presented to him/her as aspects of a discourse resistant to the ideological structure of racism and *apartheid*, but, more than that, the viewer is challenged to engage with the experience of the artist as individual. Thus, in Voyiya's images, personal experience locates the discourse in a model of interaction and recognition, rather than domination and abduction. For as hooks so powerfully states: "there is no freedom to be found in any dominator model of human relationships...to end our cultural fascination with violence, and our imposition onto men in general and black men in particular, we must choose a partnership model that posits interbeing" (2004: 66).

Interbeing in this sense reinforces the Foucauldian notion of power relations as not being in positions of "exteriority with respect to other types of relationships (economic processes, knowledge relationships, sexual relations)" (1990: 94). Power

is everywhere, power comes from below: Voyiya's transitory moment of resistance conveys both of these superbly well.

In exploring hooks' interbeing as possible means of agency and subjectivity, I would like to refer to the work of American artist Lyle Ashton Harris. In the work entitled Constructs #13 (1989) (see **Plate 21**), a single example from a series of self-portraits, Harris positions himself as a nude, against a completely black backdrop, with his back to us. His stance is composed and still, as if almost awaiting the gaze of the viewer. Not unlike the work of Mapplethorpe, in which the body of a black male ends up being robbed of any subjectivity, Harris's self portrait draws the viewer into the process, objectifying his body.

However, the fact that the image is a self-portrait resists voyeurism, when one learns of the powerful context of self-presentation as a black and gay man. He, as the subject, seems fully aware of the gaze being imposed on his body as object/subject and convolutes the relationship between viewer and artwork through his perceived self-objectification. The almost clinical nature---I use the word 'clinical' in the sense that Harris's pose and posture are not dissimilar to images of a medical nature, such as those of early photographers of the human physique---of this image can be found in other fields, particularly those of ethnographic documentation.

Harris avoids confrontation with the viewer facially, obscuring his face as a marker of identity and his phallus as a marker of black masculine identity, in opposition to Mapplethorpian signifying practice, and gives the viewer his back. Furthermore, Harris himself has chosen to 'capture' this image, which means it is fully self-referential on the part of the artist, and discourages any feelings of ownership on the part of the viewer. In this sense, the viewer of the image is left stranded, as no more than a casual observer of this; he or she has no claim over the physicality that Harris presents. Of Harris' work, Golden remarks that, "with a figure bald and nude, a wig askew, or a penis peeking through tulle, these images are about prosaic reality which, as the photos attest, is far from ideal. Harris gives himself the subjecthood that Mapplethorpe often denied his subjects" (1994: 33). It is this momentary 'subjecthood' in Harris' Constructs #13 which represents another transitory moment of resistance against discourses which position black men and black bodies in

stereotypic mode, thus effecting the kind of discursive 'cleavage' which could result in new 'regroupings', i.e. new understandings and perceptions of the black male body reflective of the notion of 'interbeing'.

The act of cauterizing the viewer's potential for objectification, by imposing his intention and agency on the image, is in keeping with most of Harris's work. The element that makes this possible is his lived experience, his history. This exploration of history is difficult for Harris as he attempts to construct an alternative discourse of black masculinity, still defined in the vocabulary of white hegemony. There is no one universal template for the representation of black men; however, Harris' work suggests that there could be a discourse which is the product of the subjectivity, active agency and experience of black masculinity, outside of the vocabulary of *otherness*.

Harris, in effect, is thus involved in the creation of a new *language* of representation. In the field of contemporary African literature, Achebe clearly feels similarly about English: "I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit new African surroundings" (in Ashcroft 1995: 286). So Harris invents a new vocabulary and language, not obviously 'in full communion' with its history, but certainly altered to suit new understandings of black masculinity. For, as Golden argues: "to break with the ruling hegemony that has a hold on images of the black male body, a revolutionary visual aesthetic must emerge that re-appropriates, revises, and invents, that gives everyone something new to look at" (1994: 138).

Exploring self has directed the Zimbabwean artist, Vulindlela Nyoni, to create artworks that reflect his understanding of exploring a subjective self outside of the discourse of objectification. His first solo exhibition of prints, drawings and photographs entitled "non-threatening postures" in 2001, created as the practical requirement for his Masters degree, focussed on representations of black males as explorations of moments of transitory subjectivity. In a series of three black and white photographs entitled Fragments (2001) (see **Plates 22-23).** Nyoni employs the

use of the black male figure in a way that sets out to challenge the black male as art object.

In these images, a single black nude male stands, barely recognisable, sheathed within layers of partially opaque plastic wrap. The figure is restrained by plastic and bound with tape, gauze bandaging and rope, alluding to issues of packaging, bondage and forced restraint. To interrogate notions of objectification, Nyoni uses a model, Sipho, a personal friend, and chooses rather to be behind the lens in the active role of photographer, selecting and directing the viewer's attention and gaze. The model is thus deliberately reduced to an object. The discourse of objectification is thus being appropriated to subvert it and engender a counter-discourse.

The images are broken up into specific shots of parts of the body, for example, the shoulder, the feet, clenched fists, and neck, where small areas of telltale skin are revealed through gaps in the covering. Nyoni's further intention in works such as these is to query possible responses of desire and fetishism and counter the idealised black bodies photographed by Mapplethorpe, in which the black body is presented as product and object to be eroticised and gazed upon. Nyoni's photographs aim to make real the state of objectification and anonymity contained in Mapplethorpe's work, through the act of restraint, but also interrogate the notion of agency and subject/object relationships, beyond the hierarchical notions of race.

The images foreground agency by suggesting, through the inactivity of the subject/object being photographed, that agency lies elsewhere and not entirely in the constructed vision of bondage and restraint. The body is mummified, with his identity hidden/layered in sheets of gauze. The figure is bound and preserved in a state of non-action and the viewer is thus persuaded to respond to the image on terms that the artist/photographer has knowingly constructed.

In another work titled non-threatening postures (2001) (see **Plates 24-25**), a triptych, Nyoni presents the viewer with three monochromatic collagraphs. The three prints are of a half-naked black male standing in a nondescript space, whose identity is obscured by bandages wrapped around his face. Our view in each image shifts from a 'waist-up' perspective to a close-up of the bandages in the final frame. In the final

frame, the figure starts to remove the bandages, trying to reveal his true face to the viewer. Each print depicts different points in a narrative in which the subject physically interrogates himself as a perceived violent element in society and asks how far he may go to appear non-threatening to a viewer. At the same time he struggles to present himself as individual and subject separate from racial and gender stereotyping.

The work is of a personal nature to Nyoni as the subject matter sprang from his experience of his masculinity being perceived stereotypically as violent and as aggressive. The work interrogates the internalisation of dominant discourses of black masculinity and the active role of an ideology, underpinned by stereotypes, within a contemporary South African environment. Nyoni locates this event within an encounter with a young woman who happened to be walking in the same direction as he was on his way home. "The young woman made every effort to ensure she kept a safe distance between her and me, looking back over her shoulder every now and then to make sure that I had not taken up the chase as an aggressor. I couldn't understand why I would be perceived as a threat, let alone think of myself as one. Later I realised that, by noticing her fear, and her furtive glances, I was actually fuelling it, that in some way I was creating a reality in which I *was* an aggressor. I began thinking about W E B du Bois who asked 'How does it feel to be a problem?' (in Belton 1995: 9) " (Nyoni 2001: personal notes). Here Nyoni clearly draws on lived experience and his response to *othering* to create a discourse resistant to dominant discourses of black masculinity.

In a series of drawings, untitled: seven heads (2006), Nyoni utilises self-portraiture in order to continue with this process. The series, viewed in its entirety, presents momentary instances throughout which Nyoni explores his reactions and perceptions of self after the loss of his mother to diabetes in 2003. The confrontation of individual loss is thus embodied in the exploration of a social identity linked to familial situation.

Prompted once again by lived experience, Nyoni interrogates his subjectivity as a black male, whose identity is now markedly altered by separation from aspects of home and history. For, as Doy states, "history, accompanied by a questioning of the

presentation of self in history, are important" (2000: 147). A 'questioning of the presentation of self in history' is essential to the conception of this series.

In Head No 1: Safe from Harm (2006) (see **Plate 26**) Nyoni presents a six times larger than life scale head that floats disembodied on the picture plane with a stake projecting from the base of the neck where shoulders would indicate the presence of a body. With eyes closed, the head embodies a distinct moment of subjective experience, affected by external features introduced as part of the image. Nyoni carefully weaves a weavers' nest into the realistically rendered form of the head. The nest merges with his flesh to become one entity in which a small bird is trapped.

The location of the history of the image is of importance in that each representation in the series is particular to an aspect of Nyoni's experience of a private, but public and social aspect, of his personal history, an aspect of representation in black visual culture that is all too often absent. Black visual culture, as constructed by the dichotomies or binary oppositions devised by white western patriarchal hegemony, often neglects the private and familial aspects of blackness in favour of keeping operational a stereotypical discourse of power, which locates violence, poverty, disease, alcohol abuse and baby rape in black domesticity. As hooks remarks: "read any article or book on black masculinity and it will convey the message that black males are violent" (2004: 47).

Nyoni challenges the stereotypical vocabulary that locates violence in black masculinity and domesticity by drawing his head as the victim of some assumedly violent act, but presenting it in a serene manner that speaks of dislocation, rather than terror. The use of codes and symbols derived from his visual vocabulary enable Nyoni to interrogate the construction of his-*self.* The word 'nyoni' in isiZulu means 'bird' and thus Nyoni has located his discourse on subjectivity within the context of his immediate audience resident in KwaZulu-Natal, mindful of the fact that he is an immigrant from Zimbabwe with a Zulu name. Nyoni, as author of the work, asks viewers to engage with the meanings contained within his work as a means by which his subjective self and agency can be recognised in the transient moment, creating 'cleavages' in dominant discourses of black masculinity and alternative sites of resistance.

The means by which subjective self can be constructed in representations of blackness and black masculinity is reliant on a new vocabulary of blackness that affirms, strategically, a blackness not located in binary oppositional structures to hegemonic whiteness. Blackness must be explored within new discourses of blackness. As discussed earlier in the chapter, exploring what it means to experience and represent the subjective self with agency is a precarious process, as the poststructuralist theory I have used for my analysis resolutely deconstructs the existence of a unified and uninterrupted self.

This chapter sought to explore the means by which black male subjectivity in the visual arts could explore agency and subjectivity by deploying a strategy of not seeing and representing self as *other*. Constructing self involves power and resistance. Power, in the memorable words of Foucault, does indeed come from below. This cratology subverts previously understood notions of power and resistance and seems to me to be essential to the process of shifting representations of blackness and black masculinity away from discourses of *othering*.

This alternative understanding of power and resistance as a conscious rejection of dichotomising and disempowering discourses, which reify images of the powerful and the powerless, aggressor and victim, subject and object, could result in the kind of transformation envisaged by hooks: "loving blackness as political resistance transforms our ways of looking and being, and thus creates the conditions necessary for us to move against the forces of domination and death and reclaim life" (1992: 20). Reclaiming the black body is to reclaim its life.

3.5. CONCLUSION

This dissertation, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the MAFA degree, is an attempt to examine discourses on black bodies, black masculinity and identity, and to interrogate the notions of subjectivity and agency, within a poststructuralist theoretical paradigm.

Visual culture was chosen as a medium of exploration in order to contextualise the questions posed---clearly my dissertation was conceived of as standpoint research. I am a black male artist whose work reflects on subjectivity, black identity and black masculinity, rooted in representations of the black male body.

In my research, I intended also to interrogate theoretical discourses on identity and representation, in order to construct a theoretical space in which structures of domination, subjugation and stereotype can be analysed. I intended to demonstrate too that these discourses can be seen as active in the practice of art-making.

Revisiting a methodological approach

As stated in my essay on methodology, I conceived of this research as qualitative research within the Human Sciences. As I believe that masculinity and identity are socially constructed, I used a wide range of poststructuralist, feminist and identity theory in order to inform my exploration of ideology, identity and subjectivity.

Using Foucault's model of power and resistant discourses, I problematised the concept of agency and subjectivity (within networks of power) and attempted to show that discourses resistant to hegemonic discourses of black bodies and homogenised masculinity are possible within representation. I used selected artworks to illustrate the construction of black bodies both in colonial and in resistant discourses, currently being created in contemporary works by black artists, which aim to resist *othering*. The following is a brief summary of the structure of the dissertation with particular focus on the processes undertaken in exploring black identity.

Chapter 1: Structure and findings

My aim was to locate perceived black identities within discourses of power. Chapter one focussed primarily on the use of colonial ideology in formulating and contributing to stereotypical representations and assumptions of blackness. Exploring the work of Althusser enabled a definition of how ideologies operate. Importantly, I attempted to understand how ideologies function within the social and cultural imaginary as constitutive of people's 'realities'. The relationship between ideologies and power was explored further in analysing the effects of colonialism in southern Africa and the operation of colonial ideology.

A key component to understanding colonial ideology was in the examination of artworks of the era, specifically works by Baines. As an artist in the colonial period, Baines was informed by the ideologies attendant on European conquest and expansion and his work reflected this. By establishing difference based on skin colour and cultural practice, colonial ideologies developed systematic and hierarchical means of *othering*. These ideologies resulted in the construction of black identities that were located in negative stereotypes. I explored these negative stereotypes and interrogated their effect on examples of representation. Chapter one ended with the notion that stereotypes continue to govern perceived black identities in society and art.

Chapter 2: Structure and findings

In chapter two the primary intention was to explore representations of blackness and black masculinity in which stereotypes informed an ideology of difference and perpetuated processes of *othering* based on sexuality and skin colour. In contrast to chapter one, chapter two focussed on more visual material, although a strong theoretical foundation informed the examination of examples of work by Trevor Makhoba and Robert Mapplethorpe. The focus of Chapter two was on discourses of blackness as perceived, constructed and actively deployed as functional *other* to hegemonic discourses of whiteness.

Fanon's work *Black Skins White Masks* (1986), although rooted in a specifically dated discourse of *othering*, still proved vital to an understanding, as was set out in

Chapter one, of a historical contextualisation of *other* and stereotype. The theoretical location of an oppositional blackness posed by Fanon and supported by hooks and Doy led to the questioning of subjugating structures inherent to hegemonic discourses of power, such as the gallery space, language and westernised visual culture. Poststructuralist theory (e.g. Bhabha, Spivak and Hall) again provided the means by which hierarchies and subjugating structures were interrogated.

At this point, I explored identity as a constructed position (not as some mysterious essentialist entity), temporary, transient and rooted in networks of power. How this is relevant to black identities is in the understanding that black identity has been constructed through the dominant episteme of white supremacist hegemony and reflected upon in this manner in the visual arts, often as an ideal *other*. Black identity is viewed as divergent from a constructed 'norm' and embodied in the lived experience of being black. The ideal *other* in this regard is based on historically established stereotypes around sexuality, virility, intelligence and subservience.

hooks and Doy, after Fanon, provided insight into a critique of blackness and black identity (as constructed by white hegemonic theory) which continues to internalise binary oppositions and stereotypes. Chapter two concluded with the interrogation of black subjective experience through the recognition of self and agency in the construction of counter-hegemonic discourses.

Chapter 3: Structure and findings

My focus in this chapter was on exploring subjectivity and the possibility of representing black subjective experience in the visual arts as a means of negotiating black identities not subject to discourses of white hegemony. I conceived of subjectivity as intentional positions, adopted by the artist, where moments of self recognition take place in, specifically, representations of the black male body. The chapter explored the work of three artists, Vuyile Voyiya, Lyle Ashton Harris, and Vulindlela Nyoni, as examples of work by black males which attempt to resist inherited discourses of blackness, by creating resistant identities through the lived experiences of being black and male, as interpreted by black males. The chapter

stressed the importance of self-representation as a means to destabilizing discourses of power, which continue to represent blackness as (often violent) *other*.

As with most research in the Human Sciences, the outcomes of a thesis such as this do not result in quantifiable integers. However this dissertation has revealed the following as crucial areas for further research in the context of representations of blackness in South Africa: how race has been, is, and can be constructed in the visual arts; how representations of black male bodies contribute to discourses of black masculinity and identity; how black artists have established, and are in the process of establishing, vocabularies of black subjectivity, rooted in lived experience, which both echo and destabilise hegemonic discourses of blackness and black masculinity. I have deliberately avoided analyses of representations of black femininity, not because of an inherent masculinist bias, but because I wanted this research to reflect my lived experience: that of a black male artist who depicts black male bodies as an act of representational resistance.

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(Carruthers, J. 1990: 56).

Plate 2: "Napoleon crossing the Alps", J.L. David. 1801, oil
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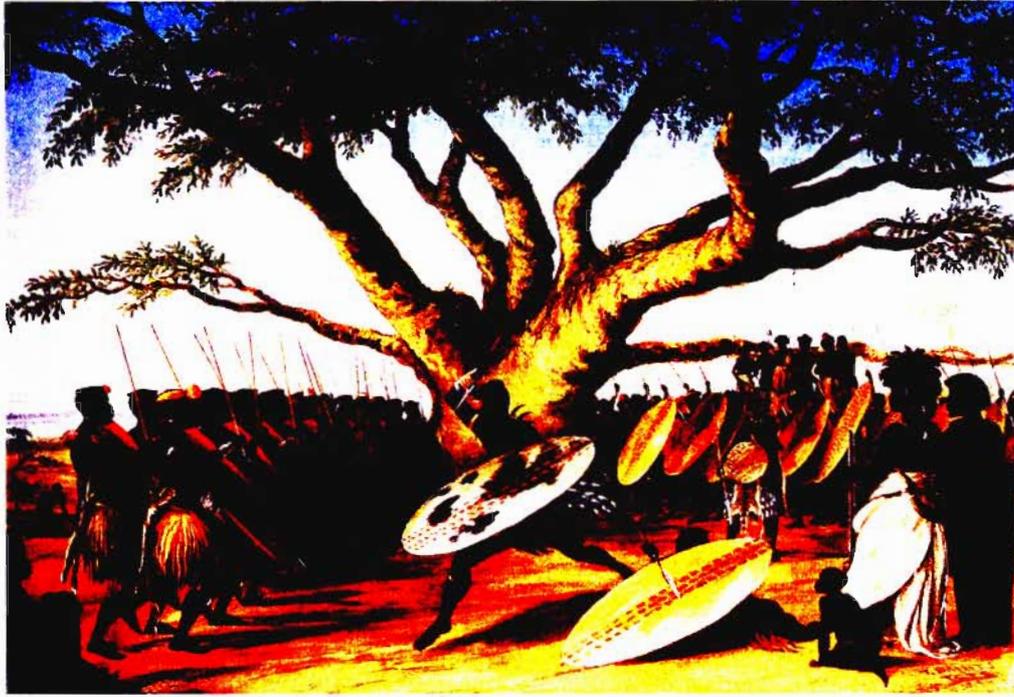
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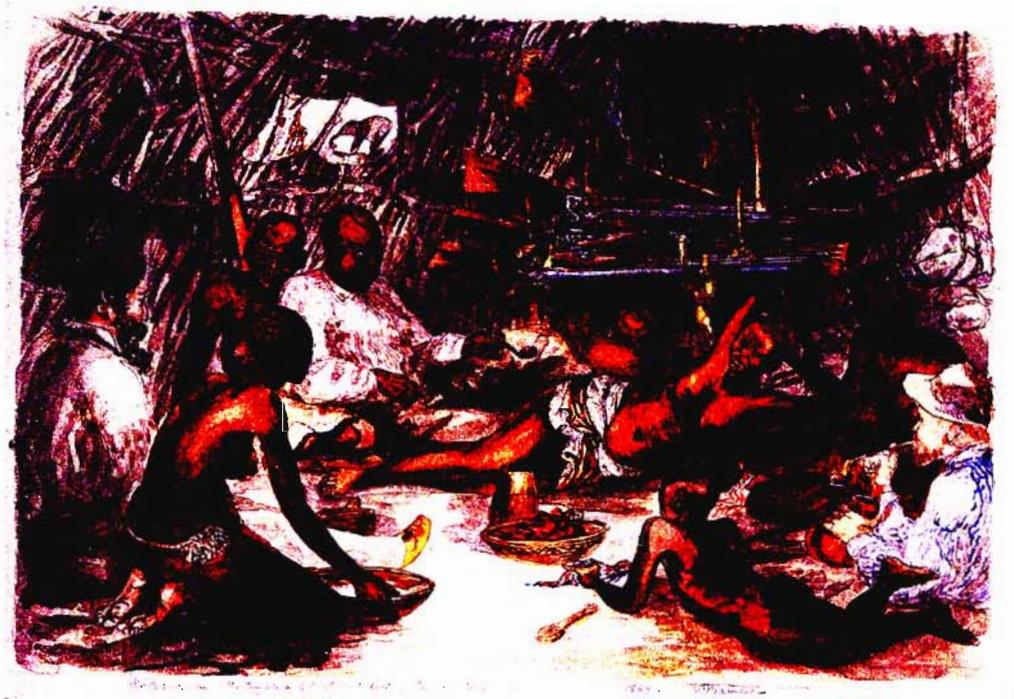
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Plate 8: "Bushman", A. Van Wouw. 1902, bronze
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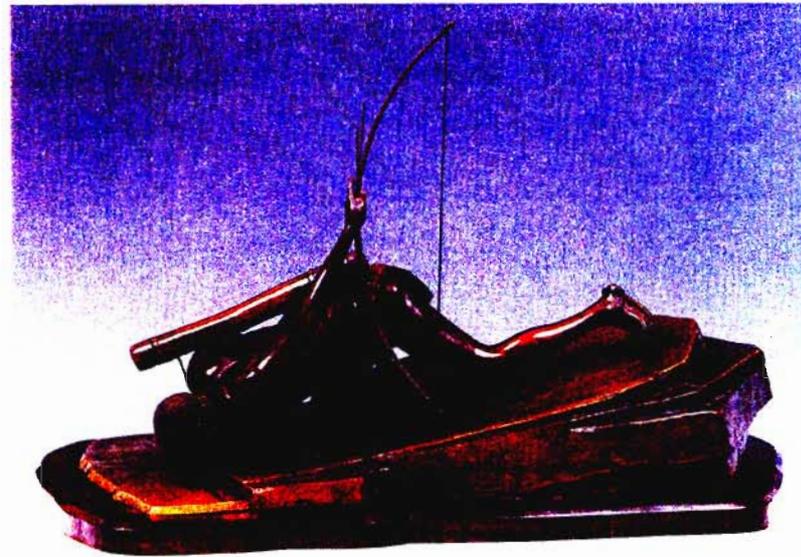
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cat.128 [Portrait of a man]

cat.129 [Portrait of a man]

Plate 10: "Portrait of a Man", G. Bhengu. date unknown, pencil and watercolour
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Plate 11: "Portrait showing facial scarification of the Bhaca clan", G. Bhengu. date unknown, pencil and watercolour (Bell, B. & Clark, B. (eds.). 1995: 48).

Luke-The Baboon Boy.

Plate 12: "Luke the Baboon Boy", Photographer unknown. 1920, postcard from South Africa (Pieterse, J. N. 1992: 42).
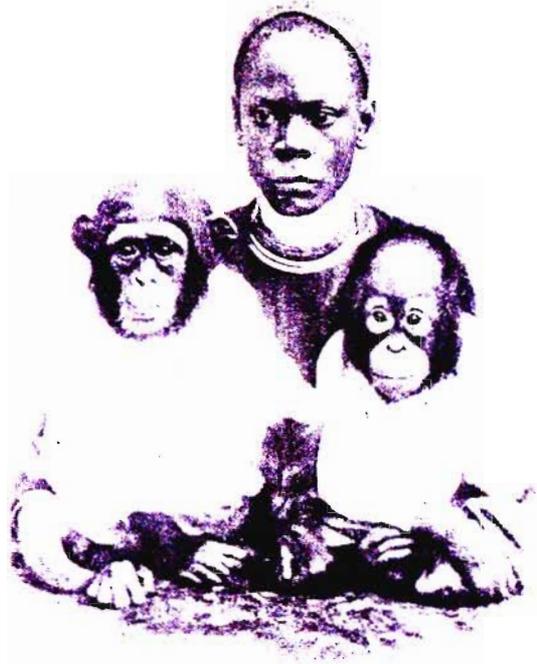
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Plate15: "Dogs on duty", T. Makhoba. 1995, oil
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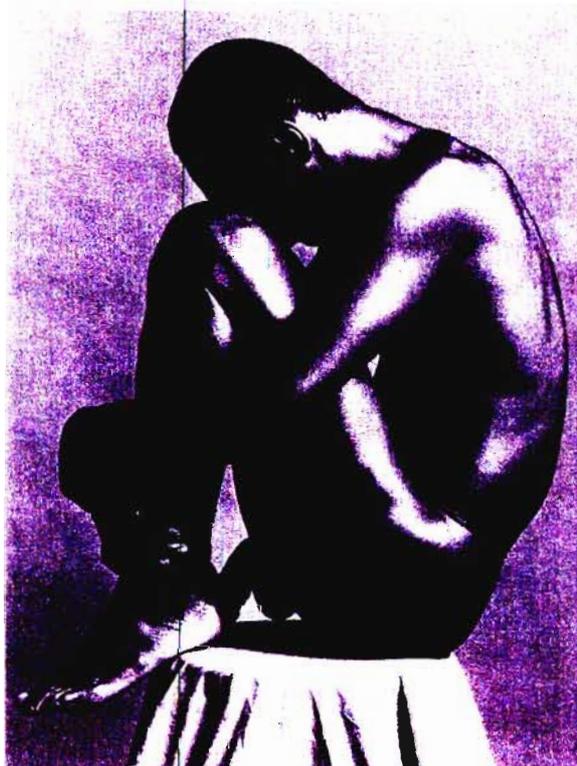
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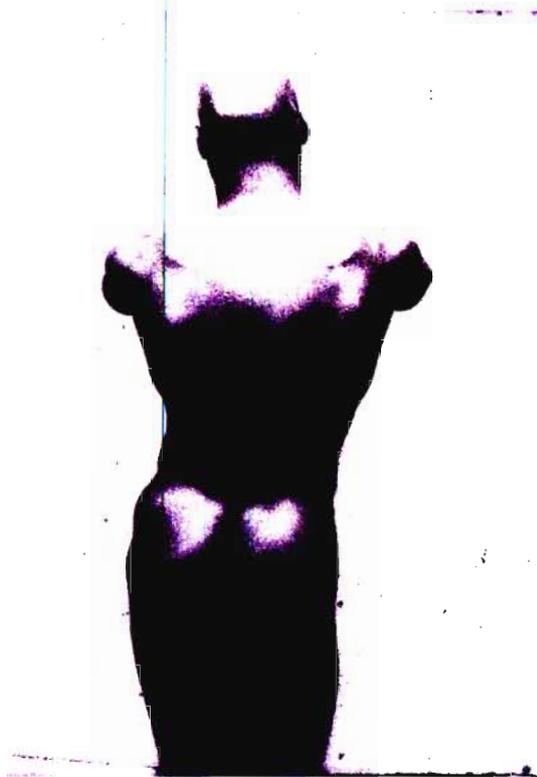
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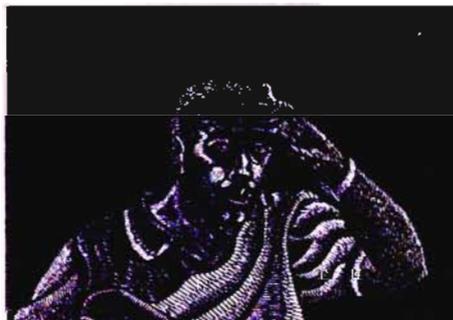
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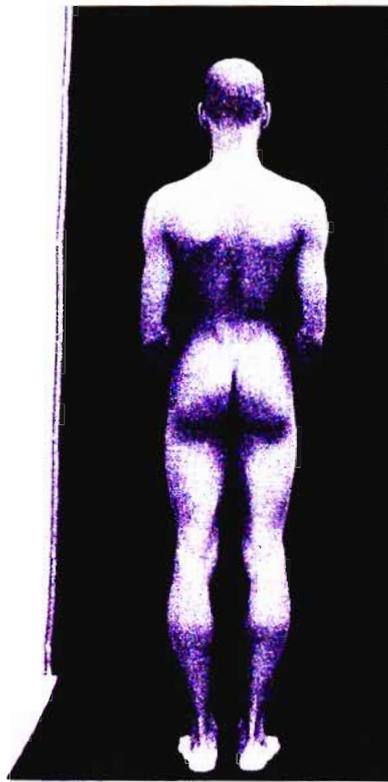
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Plate22: "Fragments" (1/3). V. Nyoni. 2001, black and white photograph
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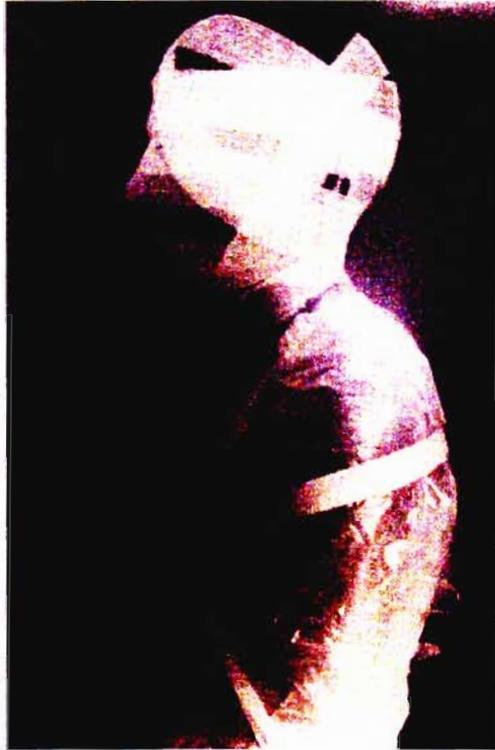
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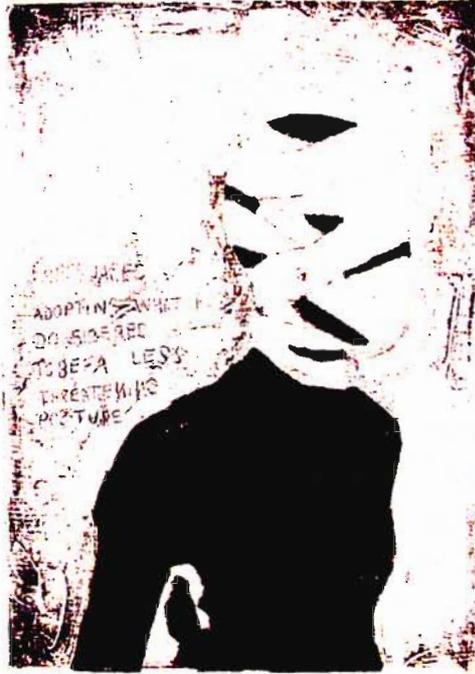
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