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Beyond Afrocentricism and Orientalism: Contemporary Representations of Transnational Identities in the Works of Nontsikelelo “Lolo” Veleko and Tracy Payne.

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Hayley Pycroft

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Abstract

South African photographer Nontsikelelo “Lolo” Veleko and South African painter Tracy Payne explore different ways of communicating African realities. The visual imagery of these two artists focuses a lot on movement, challenging the rigidity of boundaries set by Western social constructs. In their work, Veleko and Payne critique the limitations of terms such as “authenticity.” It is extremely difficult to portray shifting notions of contemporary African identity in light of the stain of colonial philosophies which have, in times past, exoticised and appropriated the African body and ascribed conventions of “authenticity” to African representations. Undermining the burden of Western boundaries¹, Veleko and Payne redefine what it means to operate in Africa today. Veleko seeks additional cultural realities to complicate her identity as a woman living in Africa while Payne uses concepts of movement to question the validity of structures which advocate an either/ or binary such as “East” and “West” and “masculinity” and “femininity”. By subtly merging aspects of these binaries in their representations, Veleko and Payne bring transnational possibilities to light by undermining the restrictions inscribed in the social and political history of (South) Africa with regard to collective and individual identities.

Constructs of gender have contributed to a heightened sense of “African” “masculinity,” forming a stereotype of the African body which is difficult to break free from. Considering the notion of transnationalism and the issue of moving beyond boundaries, borrowing aspects of different cultures in attempt to better define a sense of self, Veleko and Payne engage in the sampling of different lifestyles and perspectives to better define their individualities. This thesis seeks to provide an analysis of the visual language used by Veleko and Payne to promote fluid “African” identities.

¹ (And labels such as Orientalism, a Western concept imposed on those living in a region known as “East”, and Afrocentricism, a movement constructed to create an African-oriented world view free from Eurocentric biases)

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Introduction

In response to historical Western domination and resulting forms of racism over African and Eastern countries, contemporary socio-political and economic associations between various African and Eastern countries are growing¹. Connections between African and Eastern countries can also be noticed in the arts, as institutions and artists attempt to circumvent dominant Western countries in favour of relationships with China for example. In this thesis I consider how South African artists Nontsikelelo “Lolo” Veleko and Tracy Payne complicate stereotypes of “race” and “gender” in their contemporary representations of “Eastern” and “African” bodies. I utilize theories of Afrocentricism and Orientalism to unpack constructions of “Africa” and the “East,” and moving beyond such theories I explore transnational trends in the new African avant-garde.

Nontsikelelo “Lolo” Veleko was born in 1977 and grew up in Cape Town. She currently lives and works in Johannesburg and is a project manager at the Market Photo Workshop. Veleko is at the forefront of contemporary visual culture and has been included in a number of prestigious exhibitions such as *Snap Judgements* (2006) and *A Decade of Democracy* (2004). Little in-depth writing exists on Veleko’s work, and most of this literature (Murinik 2007; Perryer 2005; Buys 2007) focuses on her signature series *Beauty is in the Eye of the Beholder* (2003/2006). Nothing substantial has been written on Veleko’s 2006 *Chinese/Japanese* series, which is the series I focus on², making my choice of these photographs pertinent.

¹ According to Hannah Edinger (2009), an Economist at the Centre for Chinese Studies at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa, from the start of the 21st century, the modern state of People’s Republic of China has built increasingly stronger economic ties with African nations. As of August 2007, there are more than 750,000 Chinese nationals working in different African countries. Trade between China and Africa has increased 700% during the 1990s. China is currently Africa’s second largest trading partner after the United States.

² Two images from which were included in *Wonderland* (2008), Veleko’s Young Artist Award travelling exhibition.

According to Veleko, her *Chinese/ Japanese* series developed out of “an unexplainable love for the East;”³ and it is this energy which is presented to the viewer in the images *Liberty* (2007) and *Love for Self* (2007) that are integrated into her *Wonderland* (2008) body of work. Considering the initial title under which these works were exhibited, *Chinese/Japanese*⁴, the viewer may consider the term *Chinese/Japanese* to be problematic as it has a propensity to play into the sweeping notion of Orientalism (Said 1978) engineered in the “West.” Looking at a variety of texts problematising the notion of Orientalism, it is generally accepted that “Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said 1978:94). Although this notion of simplifying cultures is a very important aspect to be considered (an aspect examined in chapter one), with reference to Veleko’s dress in *Liberty* (2007) and *Love for Self* (2007), the prototype of the kimono, like so much else in Japan can be traced to China⁵. The link between Chinese and Japanese cultures in Veleko (and later, I argue in Tracy Payne’s work) reflects such records of history, where early makeup and constitution of Japanese cultural styles distend from Chinese models of dress.

Veleko is intrigued by the way in which various aspects of Chinese and Japanese history, culture and philosophy are comparable to those of Africa, as colonialism oppressed people living in Africa in a similar manner to the way in which Orientalism exploited people living in Asia in

³ Personal correspondence with Veleko, date: 6 August 2007.

⁴ Images *Love For Self* (2007) and *Liberty* (2007) were initially exhibited in a series titled *Chinese/Japanese*. These images were later included in Veleko’s *Wonderland* (2008) body of work.

⁵ Liza Dalby in her book *Kimono: Fashioning Culture* (1993:25) notes that the front-wrapping robe with rectangular sleeves was the basic shape of Chinese clothing from the time of the Han dynasty, approximately 200 B.C.-A.D. 200. Dalby (1993: 25) argues that during the seventh, through to the tenth centuries any culture striving to be considered legitimate and respectable would have been powerfully drawn to undertake the rituals, writing, and technology of Chinese culture. As such Dalby (1993:26) notes that clothing, shoes, hairstyles, and paintings all borrow from and reflect Chinese Sui and Tang courtly styles.

times past. It is this correlation which inspires Veleko to reflect on Chinese and Japanese links. Subtly unpacking these inter-cultural links with regard to issues of race, Veleko uses inter-cultural integration as a departure point from which to break down binaries of colour and create quirky, energetic identities which complicate simplistic stereotypes of South African “blackness.” Dealing with representations of “race” in a nuanced way, Veleko shapes new transcultural, transracial identities in her photographic self-portraits. Rather than pursuing an essentialist core of Afrocentricity (Asante 1996), Veleko draws on cultural codes of the “East” to construct a transnational⁶, global sense of self.

The second artist I look at is Tracy Payne who was born in Cape Town in 1965 and continues to live and work there. Payne’s engagement in Japanese arts and culture led her to Tokyo in March 2002 for the cherry blossom festivities, and this exposure seemed to spark much of her present-day paintings. Payne’s 2007 *Sacred Yang* exhibition is an extension of her focus on the cultivation of harmony, embracing a state of balance where counter extremities are welcomed, enmeshed and interknit in society. Prior to this exhibition Payne’s dealings with contentions of gender has been rather dissonant. *Sacred Yang* (2007) stands as a cathartic, meditative response to Payne’s much earlier works such as *The Opiate* and *Judith and Holofernes* (1993) and seems to grapple with society’s propensity to dissect the notion of gender into paired norms. In relation to Payne’s work I review varied racialised formulations of gender, namely that of the “hyper-masculine” “African” male (Gray 1995; Hooks 2004) and the “feminine” “Eastern” male body (Brownell 2002:15). I consider the way in which Veleko and Payne disfigure binaries such as those which cut apart notions of masculinity and femininity and instead meld and inter-relate

⁶ The word “transnational” is an adjective found in many standard dictionaries, used to indicate a collapse of national boundaries and infer the growth and expansion of information or political institutions which cross national borders and move beyond a particular region or part. AskOxford.com. Retrieved on 22, October 2009 from www.askoxford.com: http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/transnational?view=uk I use the word “transnational” to refer to the extending beyond the boundaries and interests of a single nation or group.

these concepts in their representations. I recognise the way in which both artists reflect on the “West’s” eroticised and “orientalised” realisation of the “Eastern” female body, noting that the “Orient” is a “Western” fabrication. I break down dichotomies between “the West” and “the rest” (Chinweizu 1975), and explore the “in-between” space of boundaries where transcultural elements are able to merge.

Chapter one of this thesis investigates how African Artists have been “written into” the *idea* of Africa with regard to exhibitions. In this chapter, I unpack the article “*African Art and Authenticity: A Text with a Shadow*,” in which Sidney Kasfir (1999) studies how African (and Eastern) cultures have been appropriated and oversimplified by the “West” and manipulated in an effort to better assimilate “Africa” and the “East” as unchanging, consistent entities. I note how in the recent past this has ensued in several pursuits to challenge and disrupt Western prevarications of “authentic African art,” as in seen in exhibitions such as *A Fiction of Authenticity: Contemporary Africa Abroad* (Fitzgerald and Mosaka 2003). The result is a transcendence of geographical, cultural and racial proscriptions, and the materialisation of more indefinite, adjustable and transnational identities.

The political histories of the African continent have incited a need for Africans to unite and this has been accentuated by several leaders, such as the late Ghanaian president Kwame Nkrumah⁷ and American philosopher W.E.B. Du Bois⁸ who promoted African unity. Afrocentricity became popular amongst Africans on the continent and in the diaspora because it holds on to the idea of a unified identity or a distinctive African personality, positioning Africa in the centre, which is a point of reference for all Africans. Looking at one of the definitions of Afrocentricity, Welsh (1996) argues “Afrocentricity is an uncovering of one’s true self, it is the pinpointing of one’s

⁷ Kwame Nkrumah (21 September 1909 - 27 April 1972) was president of Ghana from 1952 to 1966.

⁸ William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (February 23, 1868 – August 27, 1963).

centre, and is the clarity and focus through which black people must see the world in order to escalate.” Although Afrocentricity is in some ways a reaction to colonial dominance in Africa, it also responds to racism in the USA, and many of the central authors (Asante 1996; Karenga 2001 and Clarke 1992) who embrace the resolute vision of African empowerment, live outside of Africa. I argue as such, that the “idea” (Mudimbe 1994)⁹ or “invention” of Africa (Appiah 1992) is largely being “written” in the “West.” Reflecting on the “idea” (Mudimbe 1994) of Africa, I consider the “idea” of the “East,” noting the way in which the “West” has invented the notion of “Orientalism” (Said 1978) to construct and enframe the “other.” According to Edward Said (1978:3), “Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it; in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.”

The notion of Orientalism (Said 1978) is responsible for critical misconceptions between the East and the West. It has revealed the way in which “Western” domination and hegemony has heavily influenced global perceptions of the “East,” creating popular views of the “East” as simplistic, essentialist, static and one-dimensional. My engagement with notions of Orientalism here establishes the ground for a later discussion in the second chapter, with contemporary perspectives of the “East”/ “West” binary.

In chapter two I examine Veleko’s works *Liberty* (2007) and *Love for Self* (2007) in her *Wonderland* exhibition (2008) as well as Payne’s *Sacred Yang* (2007) series, noting that while assimilating situations of the past into their realities, these artists also compose a third framework for dealing with identity, the frame of possibility. Veleko and Payne operate in transnational and

⁹ In his book *The Idea of Africa* Mudimbe (1994) argues that influential European scholarship has prevented an awareness of the complex cultural milieu we refer to by the term “Africa”. Resisting the idea which prevails in many European views of Africa, that “the other” is “barbaric” and “untamed”, Mudimbe tells the stories of the periphery, emphasising the ambiguity and imprecision which surrounds the subjective character of our attempts at self-knowledge.

transcultural realities; realities which coalesce elements of movement, prospect, fantasy and vision. By creating a sense of transition between nations, Veleko and Payne complicate stereotypes of what it means to operate in “Africa.” Transcending boundaries and creating transnational links with the “East,” these two artists create a dialogue, where aspects of history, actuality and aspiration become integrated into a visual exchange.

In the first section of this chapter I examine the way in which Veleko uses gesture and clothing in *Liberty* (2007) to encourage the viewer to consider that which is outside the enclosure of the frame. By reaching out of the frame of the image, Veleko seems to encourage a point of view beyond the one she has created; asking the viewer to consider further angles beyond the ones reflected in her *Wonderland* (2008) series. These extensive, far-reaching elements in Veleko’s work are reinforced through her “Eastern” (namely Japanese style of) dress¹⁰, and trace a string of movement through her work. For Veleko, self-styling and role-play seem to offer the means for creating an identity, determining new societal precedents and by extension new economic opportunities. Veleko uses clothes as critical props to deliberately and theatrically challenge and play with assumptions of identity based on appearance and historical background. However, beneath the playful act of immediate confrontation there are elements which seem to carry deeper, personal symbolism. The red sash Veleko wears in *Liberty* (2007) subtly alludes to blood and the concept of blood-lines, drawing connective links between people of different cultures and social scenes. Blood infers continuation of generations, suggesting lineages which raise questions about cultural history and memory. Veleko’s self-portraits exist on a transformed level – an altered, enhanced state of mind, and as Mosaka (2008: 65) observes “choose to subscribe to

¹⁰ Jill Condra’s *Encyclopedia of Clothing through World History: 1501-1800* (2008:224) draws similarities between the stylistic norms of the Chinese robe, the Korean chagori and the Japanese kimono while also reveals the unique characteristics of each style of dress. It is these stylistic similarities such as the “natural, soothing lines and gracefully exaggerated A-line human shapes” which I refer to here.

multiple definitions of cultural identity that both blur the boundaries between, and undermine the hierarchies that enforce racial and economic difference.”

In the next section I introduce Tracy Payne, a painter who currently resides in Cape Town, South Africa and whose work also has transnational ties. Payne uses the spiritual *yin* and *yang* energies present in Chinese culture to subtly question, and undermine society’s construction of binaries. Payne’s *Sacred Yang* (2007) series follows on from her *Sacred Yin* (2005) series, and draws from an inspirational trip to Japan, where Payne went in search of *sakura*, the cherry blossom, as well as the art of *kinbaku*, or erotic rope bondage. The subject matter of *Sacred Yang* (2007) seems to reflect a strong Chinese influence rather than Japanese experience. Just as Japanese culture has historically borrowed and incorporated elements of Chinese culture into Japanese way of life, similarly Payne incorporates details such as the Chinese Shaolin Monk subjects in *Sacred Yang* (2007) to conflate particularities of “East,” interlinking cultures so that no one culture can be comprehensively singled out and determined in her work. Having said this, Payne’s work may at times be considered to be problematic as some of the intercultural linkages between China and Japan may be perceived to be a little too general – in some instances *Sacred Yang* (2007) treads near to a risky point where a sweeping amalgam of cultures seems a little too simplistic.

There is an interesting sense of movement and journeying in Payne’s *Sacred Yang* (2007) series, namely in images such as *Starburst Monk* (2007), and *Awakening II* (2006). Through her transient painting style, Payne effectively challenges the supposed importance and rigidity of labels found in mainstream media and popular culture. Subtly critiquing notions of masculinity and femininity in images such as *Starburst Monk* (2007) Payne subtly offsets codes of physical sturdiness and exertion against ones of emotional delicacy to undercut societal constructions of gender.

Following the theme of movement in Payne's work, the tears of the *Starburst Monk* (2007) subtly implies that the monk is in the midst of outward change and "boundary-dissolving transgressions" (Lewis and Wigen 1997: xi). This sense of movement subtly suggests that in order to gain significant meaning from the work the viewer needs to be open to changing or altering his/her outlook. The monk seems at pains to realign and resync his inner self, implying that harmony comes about through the efforts of personal endeavour. It is not enough to break down and transcend boundaries physically – if transformation is to have a significant and meaningful effect it should begin with a transformation of the self. Payne's monks are engaged in an exercise of reassessing, shifting their personal attitude and outlook, and balancing it with the changing environment. It is in this manner that Payne's work seems to present subtle commentary on the movement between geographic borders as well as ambiguities of "left" and "right," and "east" and "west." Payne's subjects in the works *Beautiful Monk* (2006), *Awakening II* (2006) and *Emerald Monk* (2007) look towards the "East". The term "East" has been used as a synonym for "Orient," indicating the widespread and remote realm outside the threshold of Europe which is home to submissive, mysterious and strangely different individuals (Lewis and Wigen 1997:55). This hazy form of definition is alluded to through Payne's hazy, indistinguishable mode of painting as well as the unfocused, indefinite gaze of the subjects in *Beautiful Monk* (2006), *Emerald Monk* (2007) and *Awakening II* (2006). Lewis and Wigen (1997: 58) note that "East is a broader term than Asia or *Orient*, yet one that retains the notion of critical distance from the culture of far western Europe". By playing into the vague perception of the "East," Payne's images challenge, in a tongue-in-cheek manner, the idea that "the farther east one looks from the West, the less significant geographical divisions become, and the more readily disparate areas seem to be conveniently lumped together" (Lewis and Wigen 1997:67).

Payne's work alludes to the fantastical stereotype of an "Eastern spiritual body" (Said 1978). Considering the monk represented in *Awakening I* (2006), I argue that the curious, bare-skinned and exotic body which subtly sweeps over the temple of the monk is a suggestion of what the monk might be envisaging or conjuring up. The restrained body which is faintly portrayed over the monk's head in *Awakening I* (2006) seems to somewhat reflect the 'West's' scanty, sparse, sketchy understanding of "Eastern" spirituality.

Payne's subjects face 'Eastward' towards a rising sun, with the anticipation of a fresh inception which supports the reassembling of individuality. I suggest that the directional indications in Payne's work challenge, in a tongue-in-cheek manner, the relevance of binary divisions, leading the viewer to consider the significance of terms such as "East" and "West" in a contemporary transnational reality. As Thompson (2008:308) notes, there is a need for dominant culture to deliberate on its tendency to construct narratives of difference and otherness that partition and cut up rather than unify and affiliate.

Chapter three of this thesis deals with the struggles involved in identity representation. "Race" and "gender" are notions which constantly jab at identity construction, and it is typecasts such as these which Nontsikelelo 'Lolo' Veleko and Tracy Payne subtly undermine in their work, *Wonderland* (2008) and *Sacred Yang* (2007) respectively. I suggest that these artists, in a nuanced way, question the information that we as viewers and individuals use to make sense of who we are, who we are not, and who we can become (Britzman 1992). In this chapter I discuss how Veleko and Payne loosen the strings of binaries and typecasts of fixed norms of "race" and gender and present the possibility complex, tangled ideologies.

The metaphor of performance provides a detailed framework for understanding the contingency of identity (Gutterman 2001:60) and serves to validate but also unfold new possibilities for expositions of the body, remodelling the supposed norm. The performance of gender is repeatedly presented through the media through ideals of masculinity and femininity. Payne's *Sacred Yang* (2007) exhibition seems to question society's tendency to binarise gender by offering representations that are neither fixedly "masculine" nor "feminine," but are perhaps a merged assemblage of the two. Veleko offers a sense of gender indifference and incertitude through gesture, clothing and colour to challenge the way in which society tends to use external signs to categorize males in a way that separates them from females and cultivates a distinct sense of masculinity and femininity. Payne and Veleko effectively destabilise gender norms, presenting a sense of illusion in their representations of the body and demonstrating Butler's (1990:141) idea that "gender norms are phantasmatic and impossible to embody".

Subtly interweaving ideas of masculinity and femininity through their approach to dress, stylistic form and colour, Veleko and Payne skillfully present the viewer with the proposition of an additional gender. In their book *Chinese Femininities*, Brownell and Wasserstrom (2002: 5) suggest the possibility of "third genders," and use this term to describe those "who are typed as neither male nor female but as [entities] that stand apart from binary and rather combine elements of [the two]". In *Sacred Yang* (2007) Payne merges seemingly womanly referents such as subtle hues of pink and glinting tears of emotion with mannish resolve. Payne's imagery such as *Starburst Monk* (2007) boldly assimilates a variety of gendered components which coalesce and feed off each other, much like a relationship of yin and yang. I suggest that Payne's representation of a "third" gender (Brownell and Wasserstrom: 2002) is not one which evokes a disconnection from gendered signifiers (such as Veleko's work implies), but a representation which embraces the polarities of masculinity and femininity and merges them into one amalgamated form.

In the following sections of this chapter I focus on unpacking stereotypes such as “Black” and “Asian” masculinity. I discuss how stereotypes such as these have been garnered in mainstream culture as a way of neatly containing and dealing with the intimidation of that which is non-Western and foreign and therefore alien, unknowable and unsettling. In the media, valiant activities and sports films display the male body as being connotative of power and strength, honouring masculine spectacle in opposition to feminine tenderness and refinement. In his book *Understanding Masculinities*, John Beynon (2002:65) notes that at the extreme, the media candidly “sexualises and eroticizes” the body. One such figure that continues to be sexualised through patriarchal media is that of the black male body. I draw on the writings of bell hooks (1995: 206) who notes that contemporary black males often use sports as one means of masculine self-assertion within an otherwise limited arrangement of opportunity. This heightened sense of the masculine is known as “hypermasculinity” and is often associated with an “excessively physical” black, male body.

Discussing the historical stereotypes of the “hyper-masculine” African male body, I refer to the notion of the “feminine” Asian male body which is often considered to be “emasculated” and “unmasculine” in Western mainstream culture. Asian males are often considered in Western mainstream rhetoric to be docile, physically petite individuals who dubiously claim citizenship and place in Western nation-states. The slight build and unassertive behaviour of these males constructs a sense of powerlessness, seemingly confirming their marginal masculinity. In direct contrast to black males who are perceived to be physically aggressive, “seen as beasts, as rapists, as bodies out of control” (hooks 1995:203); Asian males are considered to embody a vulnerable, reduced form of masculinity. Considering Lei’s (2006:177) study in a schooling system, it is important to understand that the process of identity construction is tainted and infected with the effects of regulative norms and power dynamics. Bell hooks (1995) argues that in order to fracture mainstream perceptions of the male body, an innovative visual aesthetic must

materialize that modifies, readjusts and reformulates, in order to create something fresh and novel to consider. I argue that Veleko and Payne present a selection of innovative possibilities that readjust the way the body is perceived and assessed in popular culture.

In the next section of this chapter I argue that Payne's *Sacred Yang* (2007) series sensitively undermines homogenous perceptions of gender, questioning the stereotypes of "masculinity" (Connell 1995:52) invented in mainstream Western culture. Payne's imagery noticeably engages with a few of the "masculine" ideals visible in the media, yet works such as *Golden Boy* (2007) tend to relinquish mainstream norms in favour of a more apparent connection to tender, serene practices associated with feminine and effeminate principles in contemporary culture, such as a dreamy, soft focus and gentle, muted hues of colour. By interlacing a Western sense of masculinity, with emotional, "womanly" elements in her work, I argue that Payne seems to undermine the "certainties" of masculinity, promoting a "fluid, unstable, contingent, distinct, but also entangled" (Gutterman: 2001:65) notion of gender. Payne implies through her representation of merged expressions of masculinity and femininity that these terms should not be subject to binary partition, but should be allowed to intertwine and complicate identity construction. In this space of inbetweenness, where expressions of masculinity and femininity are intertwined, I suggest that Payne develops the opportunity for the existence of what David Gutterman (2001:65) terms "profeminist men," men who use their entitled footing as men as a stage from which to contest the legitimacy and efficiency of gender divisions.

Following the exercise of manipulating and designing the body to subvert mainstream conventions, I consider issues of "race" in the photographic work of Veleko. In the exhibition *Wonderland* (2008), particularly images titled *Love for Self* (2007) and *Liberty* (2007), Veleko uses her body to engage with what it means to be a South African black woman. Instead of allowing histories and by extension implications associated with the terms "South African"

“black” “woman” to define her identity, Veleko constructs an individual narrative. By employing characteristic elements of Chinese and Japanese culture into her own way of life, Veleko reshapes understandings of South African identity. Using her body as a canvas to clothe and actively interlace local and global contemporary experiences, Veleko effectively inserts herself into an African diasporic modernity. The “Eastern” clothing Veleko wears is incorporated into her reality and integrated into her local repertoire so that the idea of that which was “foreign” or “borrowed” becomes something renowned and built-in to that which is considered to be local.

Considering the martial arts clothing Veleko chooses to wear in her *Liberty* (2007) and *Love For Self* (2007) it is fitting to consider the power dynamics of sport. Sport is a powerful organiser of gender relations, and recent history has shown that sport has the power to influence the dismissal or suppression of women, by means of serving as symbolic attestation of men’s ubiquity and right to lead (Connell 1995:54). Redressing this narrow logic that closely associates sporting competence with masculine competence; I suggest that Veleko uses strong inferences of sport in her self-portraiture to subtly give efficacy to her female identity. Clothing forms a rich site from which to examine prospect and opportunity (Tranburg Hansen 2000:227) and Veleko effectively makes use of clothing in *Wonderland* (2008) to merge inter-cultural realities, considering who she is and who she’d like to become.

Contemporary culture encourages individuals to be increasingly mobile and dispersed within national networks and cultural flows. Artists and art works operating in the transnational contemporary arts scene continuously reflect the affiliations and links which are being made within and between networks. This thesis engages with the idea of travelling, of discovering a place, and of moving on and thereby inspiring new ways of understanding the lands we dwell in. It suggests that a new type of analysis is required in order to chart transnational dimensions in contemporary art, one which acknowledges that artists are subject to influences well beyond the

places they physically inhabit and which gives due prominence to imaginative territories.

However, this study also notes the persistence of 'location' and mindsets of 'rootedness' as a determining factor in interpretation and reception, and it is with regard to this that artists Veleko and Payne subtly offer concepts of opportunity and possibility as a way of moving beyond outdated constructions.

Chapter One

Once “Written” Twice Shy: Refashioning a format

In this chapter I consider how South African Artists have been “written into” Africanity in terms of exhibitions. I reflect on the Western notion of “Authentic African art,” questioning who decides an authentic art piece from an inauthentic one, and whether this is a progressive way of considering art produced on the African continent. I base this question on an examination of the African artist as contractor, rather than effortless replicator, and glance into one example of contemporary “authentic” (South) African experience to reveal some of the complexities which exist in South African reality. In part two of this chapter I consider Africans in transit, moving beyond boundaries that have previously been imposed by the West to define Africa. Lastly, I critique notions of Afrocentricism and Orientalism, reflecting on the way in which essentialist and fundamentalist terms such as these serve to problematically describe whole cultures and whole regions, simplifying the identities of those which they claim to communicate.

I) AFRICANITY: “WRITTEN INTO” THE *IDEA* OF AFRICA

To this day, the study of African art remains largely a Western discipline, the product of Western sensibility and an expression of Western aesthetic responses to African visual culture. This partially explains the disparity between African art as it is presented in written texts and African Art in reality (Hassan 215:1999).

Western responses to African visual culture generated the idea of “authenticity,” a notion which was imposed on African art by the West as a means of determining genuine, true African art from “fakes” or replicas of another culture. The concept of “authentic African art” became a label or sales trick that was used to sell art made in Africa in the West. This notion of “authenticity” generated a discrepancy between art presented in Western written texts and African art in reality as African art was largely “spoken for” by the West. In *The Sociology of*

Tourism: Approaches, Issues, and Findings Erik Cohen (1996: 61) notes that when customs and arts are pushed into the economic sphere or commodified as resources “changes are inevitable”. Art made in Africa was transported for sale to the West and by extension decontextualised. Cohen (1996:61) argues that customs and arts undergo a series of alterations when they are considered for outside public. For example, dances and rituals are shortened or exaggerated, and customs or arts adjusted, faked and sometimes fabricated for the advantage of tourists. The idea of “Authentic African Art” is an example of Western fabrication of African art.

When cultural artefacts are exhibited out of context for public view their meanings are distorted. In her article, *Cultures for Sale: Perspectives on Colonialism and Self Determination and the Relationship to Authenticity and Tourism* Christine Ballengee-Morris (2002: 240) notes that when faced with poverty, artists often willingly and for inequitable compensation sell their resources (objects and cultural customs) in order to survive. These possessions are collected and displayed together to speak for a group of people. Often visually indicating otherness, the objects become signifiers of a culture which is in the process of being exploited. By claiming impartiality and offering these articles to the public in a “neutral” space, the Western cannon subjectively “wrote” Africa into history. Ballengee-Morris (2002: 242) notes, “the political, historical domination over minorities, stereotyping of cultures, and racist practices has created and maintained a devalued perspective of both groups’ identities [that is the dominator, for example, the “West” and the dominated so to speak, for example, Africa] and anything related to their identities”. It is impossible for associates of one ideology to accurately speak for individuals who value another, or a string of others and when this occurs the imbalance in power allows the dominant party to powerfully manipulate the way in which the “other” is perceived.

Since 1994 there has been an emphasis (with international pressure) for individuals operating in Africa to enunciate a sense of Africaness, and at times a sense of Africanism. Exhibitions such as *A Fiction of Authenticity: Contemporary Africa Abroad* (etd Fitzgerald and Mosaka 2003) subtly undermine a definite, exact or single idea of Africaness by presenting a selection of artists who have positioned themselves outside the frame of Africa, but who also remain connected. This link creates a shift in the way the world considers postmodern and postcolonial African art production. *A Fiction of Authenticity* (2003) features work by eleven contemporary artists of African descent – each of whom lives and works in either the United States or Europe and unpacks the invented idea of an “authentic” Africa. The exhibition considers the diasporic situation of these artists, as well as paradigms of discourse concerned with aesthetics, nationhood, citizenship, community, locality and sense of place and by doing this complicates notions of what it means to be African, generating a variety of expressions of Africaness.

Looking Both Ways: Art of the Contemporary African Diaspora (etd Farrell 2003) is another exhibition which features artists who were born in Africa and now live and work in Western countries including France, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, and the United States of America. This exhibition presents contemporary work that focuses on the relationships between the artists' African backgrounds and their new locations. The catalogue introduces a new generation of emerging artists who operate in the global African Diaspora. Exhibitions such as *Authenticity: Contemporary Africa Abroad* (2003) and *Looking Both Ways: Art of the Contemporary African Diaspora* (2003) give fluidity and flexibility to terms such as Africaness, opening up a space for multiple expressions and interpretations of African reality.

i) **“Authentic African art”: “Mimics” and “Replication” – who decides?**

Art that is marked for tourist consumption is often judged according to a perspective to determine authenticity... When art is commodified, it adheres to marketing rules and, in the case of tourist art, the consumer's expectations figures into the artistic process (Ballengee- Morris 2002:240).

In times past, artists operating in Africa faced an opinion assembled in the West which supposed that the capabilities of African artists to produce successful work remained in their capacity to generate “authentic African art¹¹”. This Western idea in historical cultural discourse, of “legitimate” and “genuine” African art, was pressed into the African Art making practice and African artists accommodated the demands of a Western market to increase their sales abroad. Ballengee- Morris (2002) observes how, in times past, the art of a region came to carry certain symbols or character traits, which were not solely brought about by the artists experiences or vision, but instead by a silent dialogue, a channel of messages between the expectation of the consumer [in this case the West] and the vision of the artist [Africa].

In her article *African Art and Authenticity: A Text with a Shadow*, Sidney Kasfir (1999:96) notes that a specific example of this can be observed in the carving profession, particularly Asante carving in Ghana, where “the construction of artifacts....was seen as a form of work not qualitatively very different from farming, repairing radios or driving a taxi... where artists aimed to satisfy the requirements set down by patrons, doing whatever necessary to become successful practitioner(s)”. Kasfir (1999: 96) notes however that the practice of satisfying clients did not spring out of Western intervention in Africa,

In pre-colonial patron-client interactions, it was the custom for artists to try openly to please the patrons, even if this meant modifying form. Not

¹¹ In *The predicament of culture: 20th century ethnography, literature, and art*. Cambridge, Clifford (1988: 97) uses the term “authentic” to refer to “that which has not changed.”

surprisingly, that attitude carried over into colonial and postcolonial relations with new patrons, including foreigners.

Artists operating in Africa have historically fallen under the disdainful stereotype which marks them as effortless reproducers and replicators, chiefly due to the fact that art was made with the aim of pleasing the patron. 'Replications' in the tourism industry were produced to satisfy Western clientele, yet this act of reproducing created a label which assumed African artists to be mere copiers.

In her article *African Art and Authenticity: A Text with a Shadow*, Sidney Kasfir (1999:96) suggests that the misinterpretation surrounding "copies" is due in large part to the differing perspectives of Western artists and African artists. While Western artists see the art making process primarily as a vehicle for self-realisation, Asante carvers, for example, consider the imitation of a well-known model to be neither dishonest nor corrupting; it is viewed as both economically practical and a way of validating the skill of the originator. So in fact, the act of replication in this context (which renders an artwork "inauthentic" in a Western academic perspective) actually authenticates a precious piece in Africa, making it widely acknowledged, recognised and highly regarded by African people. It is important to note here that historically, Western art sprung out of Western artists attending classes where individuals were taught the codes of painting, an etiquette which was to be suitably followed (which of course not always was, and therefore created revolutionary painters of the day.) History has shown that it is through the disruption of codes and models of thought that revolutionary genius emerges. However, art produced in Africa or by African people in diaspora which does not satisfy the Western label of "African Art," that is, art which does not circumscribe to notions of "authenticity," is still at times considered to be a poor attempt at replica. In an article titled *The Modernist Experience in African Art: Visual Expressions of the Self and Cross-Cultural Aesthetics*, Hassan (1999: 216)

notes that the fixation of Africanists with “traditional” art forms, or so called “indigenous” and “authentic” art has negatively affected contemporary forms of art in Africa. By creating “the widespread misconception that contemporary African culture is a distorted copy, a mere imitation, of Western culture, which lacks authenticity” (Hassan 1999:216), Western culture has historically pushed artists operating in Africa into a space of double negatives – a lose/lose situation where either way, their work was considered to be nothing more than effortless reproduction. Exhibitions such as *Authenticity: Contemporary Africa Abroad* (2003) and *Looking Both Ways: Art of the Contemporary African Diaspora* (2003) expand the possibilities of what it means to be African, by generating a moving, interchanging African Diaspora. This diaspora complicates ideas of African realities and facilitates a space for multiple interpretations of African experience.

In the book *Global Visions: Toward a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*, Rasheed Araeen (1994: 6) expresses his belief that artists of African and Asian origin have, in the past, been trapped in a system which welcomed fresh notions but at the same time would not let go of aged ones. This means that African and Asian artists were, from the onset, and because of historical prejudice, unlikely to succeed in a Western arts sphere. In a chapter titled, “New Internationalism: Or the Multiculturalism of Global Bantusans,” Araeen (1994:5) draws upon the 1989 exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre*, curated by Jean-Hubert Martin at the Pompidou Center in Paris as an example of the process of development in terms of simultaneously exhibiting artwork from western and non-western worlds. Araeen (1994:5) states, “Not only (did this exhibition display) all sorts of objects gathered from all over the world and put together without any regard for a common artistic criterion or framework, but also these objects were legitimised differently as art in terms of preconceived distinctions between West and non-West”. Araeen (1994:6) goes

on to argue that the reason for this curatorial approach is directly linked to the way in which the Western canon regarded other national cultures. He argues,

[The Western paradigm] did not, of course, deny the presence of others amongst its ranks. Nor were others denied their demand for equality, but this equality was offered in such a way that it did not impinge upon or question the dominant paradigm and its genealogy: different roles were provided for different artists based on racial or cultural differences. (Araeen 1994:6)

In light of this, Araeen (1994:6) feels uneasy by the manner in which “Afro-Asian artists were located and framed in this exhibition... seen as representatives only of their own cultures, creating otherness from which the artists were trying to escape”. The primary need to organise, contextualise and differentiate the foreign from the familiar leads to the creation of a homogenised outlook and it is from this perspective that African and Eastern countries have been examined, assimilated and represented “legitimately” and “authentically” in exhibitions and written texts. In her article *African Art and Authenticity* Kasfir (1999:91) notes how African (and Eastern) cultures and identities have been appropriated and oversimplified by the “West” and exploited in an attempt to better understand “Africa” and the “East” as culturally homogenised entities. To speak of “African” or “Eastern” art in such a general manner, is to oversimplify a vast and rich area of human expression. Such a sweeping, synoptic perspective is bound to miss the perplexing intricacies of reality. It is appropriate to consider here, the question posed by Kobena Mercer (2005), a cultural critic who has conducted various studies in the politics of representation in African diasporic visual arts. In his introduction to *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, Mercer (2005: 8) raises an interesting question: “to what extent has the curating of non-western materials in blockbuster exhibitions led to visual culture displays that may actually obscure fine art traditions of countries that experienced colonialism and imperialism?” In the past, art critics residing in the West had a tendency to view African art as primitive and unfit to belong in their

Western paradigm. Many of these biases and sordid opinions can be picked out in contemporary fine art discourse by the ways in which the West has chosen to display or discount art from “Africa” and the “East” to the rest of the world. Salah Hassan (1999: 217) perceives the 1995 *Venice Biennale* to be a strong exemplar of this narrow mindset,

The Biennale’s French artistic director, Jean Clair, decided to protect his “pure” European territory from contamination, by failing to invite African artists. His reason? Because “their” notion of art is different to “ours”. Implying that it was the West that raised the status of the image to its present point of sophistication.... The acceptance of a group of experienced and highly trained African artists into the arena of international art is seen as disruptive to the narrative of a superior Western art history.

Hassan argues that attitudes such as that of artistic director, Jean Clair have been proliferated in contemporary fine art discourse. It is precisely through the exposure of what it means to live in Africa today that such attitudes and perceptions of Africa can be modified.

Artists across the African continent are engaged in crafting vibrant, energetic collages which represent a multitude of contemporary African experiences. This contemporary arts scene may be likened more to a transnational boulevard than a taxidermist’s timeless and “authentic” spectacle. Driving themselves into transnationalism, artists operating in Africa are joining the field of international artists who thrive in the possibilities of fusing transcultural elements in their diverse interpretations of “home”. Revelling in the greater opportunities of national interchange, African artists are discharging the historical Western perception of African art as static and purely “African”. In his article *Africa Civilised, Africa Uncivilised: Local Culture, World System and South African Music*, Veit Erlmann (1994:166) states “I take as axiomatic the fact that in the new inter-national culture, it is products, images – designed, produced and marketed to represent an experience – that become the basic, universally valid units of culture”. In transnational, contemporary culture terms such as experience, knowledge and understanding – terms not bound

by place or ethnicity, form the new units of culture. The end of apartheid in South Africa (1994) has heralded a shift towards transnationalism in fine art discourse. The South African art world has opened up since 1994 and there has been a noticeable shift from a national, political perspective of the liberation struggle to the desire to be part of an international art scene. Nicholas Hlobo is one artist whose work creates a path from his Xhosa heritage to a contemporary culture. Exploring how traditions evolve in changing times, Hlobo's series, *Umtshotsho* (2009) examines the rituals that accompany transition. The term 'umtshotsho' refers to a traditional party for young people, the desire to explore life, to look at new conventions and draw similarities between different times. The idea of "difference" which has, in the past, been associated with distance and apprehension, is being rapidly adjusted and modernized. As Erlmann (1994:166) notes, "difference is something that relates disparate realms of experience rather than separates them". No longer is "difference" viewed as means to categorise; quite the contrary, it is welcomed as a mode of connecting distinctly different fields and familiarities. As Vincent (1999:104) notes, "we are at the helm of a knotting of hybrid discourses and this cannot be appreciated or sustained by outdated models of thought. I argue that artists operating in an African diaspora have finally managed to create a fissure, a much needed and anticipated breathing space where they are able, as Erlmann (1994:171) has anticipated, to "deliver to a metropolitan audience, images of Africa at once modern and unmistakably local".

II) MOVING BEYOND BOUNDARIES: REDEFINING AFRICA

Several generations of researchers have viewed the notion of identity with the perception of an individual being tied to a certain place, a home, a country. Uprooting oneself from this position and moving elsewhere was considered difficult as the process of integration into a different society and culture left immigrants feeling uneasy about the notion of "home" and sense of self "belonging". Nontsikelelo "Lolo" Veleko and Tracy Payne are two South African artists who develop the possibility of a mobile identity. These artists build on the notion of identity as a

construct which is endlessly expanding and growing, subject to definitions and redefinitions by diverse individuals and groups who engage with different ideas and understandings of “home.” Veleko and Payne promote a sense of fluidity and flux in their work by moving across South African, Chinese and Japanese cultures. Bringing a sense of familiarity and strangeness into their identities, these artists use the idea of extending beyond boundaries to redefine what it means to live in Africa and assume an African identity. In this section I discuss theories surrounding contemporary, transnational, mobile identities (which form a basis for understanding the work of Veleko and Payne) relative to a historical colonialist, imperialist framework. I argue that a deeper engagement and understanding of the fluidity and transmutable nature of identity will discharge the age-old Western expectation in people’s minds of what is considered to be “African Art,” and give artists operating in Africa and the African diaspora, the standing of artists working in the West, that of creative, progressive modernists.

In contemporary society the notion of “home” and “identity” is far more fluid. In his article titled *Moving Images of Home*, John Di Stefano (2002:38) states, “the notion of home is perhaps best understood as a sense of being between places, rather than being rooted definitively in one singular place and, by extension, exclusively to one single identity”. Home is a fluid space where experiences are shared and identities constantly reinvented. In his book *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, James Clifford (1997:201) writes, “Africa and Europe have been thrown together by destructive and creative histories of empire, commerce, and travel; each uses the other’s traditions (and I would argue in the same way the other’s behaviours and individual traits) to remake its own”. This sense of variability and acculturation challenges the rigidity of an outdated colonialist mindset which encouraged individuals to be “tied” or linked to geographic markers which then developed the idea of a “type” of identity, such as a distinctly “African” or “Eastern” identity. In a paper titled *Settled in Mobility: Engendering Post-Wall Migration in Europe*, Mirjana Morokvasic (2004:8) argues that the end of the bi-polar world and

the collapse of communist regimes triggered an unprecedented mobility of persons and heralded a new phase in European migrations. As she writes,

People in the Eastern part of the continent were not only “free to leave” to the West, but were more exactly “free to leave and to come back...What used to be an exodus in the time of the cold war could become a back and forth movement, as it historically used to be. Departure no longer implied leaving forever and does not, as before, exclude return (Morokvasic 2004:8).

In contemporary discourse, constant movement between places coupled with the desire to learn and appreciate diversity is considered to be a key aspect of progress and development. The method of substantiating an identity by tying individuals into groups and on to geographic landmasses is considered to be an obsolete and inadequate means of understanding and communicating a sense of individuality.

In his book *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Clifford (1997:202) examines the interrelationship between diverse cultures across borders. The increase of such interrelationships over time has developed what Clifford refers to as “transculturation”. Clifford (1997:202) notices that,

Until recently in the West, transculturation has been understood hierarchically, in ways that naturalize a power imbalance and the claim of one group to define history and authenticity. For example, Africans using Europe’s heritage were seen to be imitating, losing their traditions in a zero-sum game of acculturation; Europeans using African cultural resources appeared to be creative, progressive, inclusive modernists.

Contemporary culture provides a great amount of scope for people to extend or operate across national and continental boundaries, sharing experiences and influences which work to dissect fictional typecasts such as an idea of Africa (Mudimbe: 1994). Widening the prospects for operations between borders through television, cinema and rapidly developing internet technology, modern culture invites individuals to unfasten themselves from geographically fixed

stereotypes which have been shaped through a colonial history and instead construct a multi-focal, self-reflexive identities which operate in facets beyond the frameworks of nation states. I argue that the result of this movement, given time, will remove the age-old expectation in people's minds of what is considered to be "African Art" and give artists operating in Africa and the African diaspora, the standing of artists working in the West, that of "creative, progressive modernists" (Clifford 1997:202). As Ruth Simbao states in her article *Afri thing is not what it seems* (2008:59),

While the prefix "Afro-" has been used in the USA in historically important terms such as "Afro-Futurism" and "Afro-American Studies", the attempt to utilise it (along with the prefix "Afri-") on a global scale in order to uncritically encompass *all* "African" connections to art – from the most personally passionate to the most arbitrary and remote – reveals a reluctance to sufficiently unpack the largely American and European label "Contemporary African Art," which Lauri Firstenberg aptly suggests is more about western perception than artistic expression.

In short, Simbao (2008:59) argues that while a personal connection to Africa may at times be genuinely relevant to an artist's work, it is no longer "cutting edge" but rather simply "run of the mill" and even perhaps obsolete to use the "Afri-fad" as a plinth on which to prop an entire exhibition.

Individuals who physically move between boundaries, neither entirely leaving their country of origin, (if indeed, there is a stable notion of a country of origin) nor fully adjusting themselves to a new environment, such as migrants, refugees, guestworkers, and exiles have been noted by Michael Peter Smith (1994:20) in a study of migration, to inhabit what might be termed a state of "inbetweenness". As Di Stefano (2002: 45) notes, "migrants have created a space which allows them to inhabit both strangeness and familiarity at the same time". Individuals who are in a constant state of mobility such as these seek to harmonize aspects of their lives which fall under

circumstances of “here” and “there”¹² and find themselves constructing what Benedict Anderson (1983) would term “Imagined Communities”. In his influential book, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson (1983: 57) suggests that rather than a fixed state, the idea of a nation might be more accurately described as a performative and enacted space within which one is continually engaged in trying on roles and relationships of belonging and foreignness. I consider this idea/notion to be greatly appealing as it encourages individuals, particularly those who are constantly mobile to operate in a headspace which embraces conditions of ‘here’ and ‘there’ at the same time. Stefano (2002:40) argues that this sense of ‘betweenness’ experienced by migrants continually undergoes improvisation, as such individuals move through time and space, and concurrently through a series of fluid and invented identities. These identities, Stefano (2002: 40) argues, “do not necessarily coalesce into something hybrid, but rather coexist, suspended and independent from one another”. This is an interesting concept to consider, as individuals existing in two realities will always encounter a junction, a point where he/she is able to incorporate one identity into another. This junction point facilitates the transformation of individuals; it is a catalyst for the transfer of ideas and the very vehicle of interchange, dialogue multiple points of view. This notion grows out of Anderson’s (1983:57) assertion that nations are imagined (that there is no essential essence to national identity) and when this viewpoint is recognised, the idea of trans-nationalism becomes easier to understand and acknowledge. Transnational movement suggests that people have become channels for the movement, development and progression of media but equally, as Appadurai (1991:198) observes, images have become a means for people to transcend boundaries:

In the last two decades, as deterritorialisation has risen, images and ideas have taken on new force... More persons throughout the world see their lives through the prisms of the possible lives offered by mass media in all their forms. That is, fantasy is now a social practice; it enters, in a

¹² Diana Nemiroff (1998) in the “Crossings” catalogue discusses the issue of moving beyond the linearity of “here”, and “there”, and “inbetween”. Rather Nemiroff suggests that movement should be seen as perpetual criss- crossing, a transient state of “migrancy,” where “here” and “there” are not static but fluid and mutable.

host of ways, into the fabrication of social lives for many people in many societies.

In this state of inbetweenness, individuals are encouraged to imagine the possibilities of living in transit and travelling between borders; of relishing a state both “here” and “there” and discovering individuality through the realisation of shifting identities and cultural diversities. Appadurai (1991:198) does state here, however, that this observation is not meant to give a utopic idea of the world. Instead he proposes that even in the bleak and most discouraging of lives, where atrocious conditions worsen and the cruellest inequalities take place, people in these circumstances are now open to the prospects of the imagination. Ordinary lives in contemporary society are increasingly influenced by the possibilities offered through the media. Appadurai (1991:200) notes that the “fabrication(s) of social lives” and imagined communities are intensely connected to imagery, inspiration and opportunities that come from abroad, opening up “the possibility of divergent interpretations of what “locality” implies”. For many people the media functions as a junction point between one reality and the next. The media is the vehicle which allows them to cross and migrate between borders.

In an article titled *The Local and the Global*, Kearney (1995:548) describes the word “nation” in the term “transnational” as “usually referring to the territorial, social and cultural aspects of the nations concerned”. Kearney (1995:548) describes how transnationalism differs from globalisation,

Transnationalism overlaps globalisation but typically has a more limited purview. Whereas global processes are largely decentred from specific national territories and take place in a global space, transnational processes are anchored in and transcend one or more nation-states. Thus transnational is the term of choice when referring, for example, to migration of nationals across borders of one or of more nations. Similarly, transnational corporations operate worldwide but are centred in one home nation.

In an article titled *From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration*, authors Schiller, Basch and Blac (1994:48) argue that “today, immigrants who are in a constant state of flux are best understood as “transmigrants”. These authors suggest “transnational” migration to be “the process by which immigrants forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement... Constructing and reconstituting their simultaneous embeddedness in more than one society” (Schiller, Basch and Blac 1994: 48). These multi-stranded affiliations affect the systems in which transnational individuals exist in, as Schiller, Basch and Blac (1994:48) note:

Transmigrants are not sojourners because they settle and become incorporated in the economy and political institutions, localities and patterns of daily life of the country in which they reside. However at the very same time they are engaged elsewhere in the sense that they maintain connections, build institutions, conduct transactions, and influence local and national events in the countries from which they emigrated.

In this article, Schiller, Basch and Blanc (1994) recognize transnationalism as a social field shaped by individuals who conduct their lives by partaking in more than one nation. Victoria Bernal, Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of California, considers two influential formulations of transnationalism. Bernal (2004: 4), in her article *Eritrea Goes Global: Reflections on Nationalism in a Transnational Era*, observes that Basch’s approach has “the advantage of making people central and drawing attention to the agency of ordinary individuals in these global processes”. The second approach Bernal (2004: 4) mentions is one adopted by Appadurai who she believes sees transnationalism “largely in terms of capital, ideas and images flowing across national boundaries”. In studying Appadurai’s perspective of transnationalism, Appadurai seems to be primarily concerned with the result of people moving between nations. Appadurai’s work reflects a preoccupation with transfers of investment, technology and

interactive networks, dealing more with the theoretical process of movement and exchange than the experiences of individual people. Appadurai (1991:191) does briefly note however that transnational dealings do have great value beyond the benefits of economic production and exchange. He makes reference to the advantages of cultural interchange, cultural production and cultural reproduction, stating that,

As groups migrate, regroup in new locations and reconstruct their histories... ethnography takes on a slippery non-localised quality. Groups [tend to be less] tightly territorialisised, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogeneous (Appadurai 1991:191).

In reading Appadurai's (1991) work regarding transnationalism, it is relevant to note that, although he discusses both the economic and cultural benefits of transnationalism, he operates from a more comprehensive perspective, studying the results of these transnational shifts in a global framework. Appadurai's study is a globalised assessment of transnationalism. Schiller, Basch and Blac's (1994) study on transnationalism considers the different activities of smaller individual groups which construct and operate between national borders. Both of these texts (Appadurai: 1991 and Schiller, Basch and Blac: 1994) serve as reminders that it is impossible to grasp a sound understanding of transnationalism's evolving growth without considering the effects of transnational movement on multiple levels – both personal and communal scales, on inter-personal, inter-national and global levels. "Therefore, rather than seeking to generalize transnationalism as global phenomena, [it is important] to study various transnational experiences and communities in order to elucidate what the new potentialities of space-time compression actually mean for different populations in various contexts" (Bernal 2004: 21).

In "Reflecting on Nationalism in a Transnational Era," Bernal (2004: 4) draws attention to an important point regarding the terminology used to define transnationalism. Bernal argues that the

language used to describe the term does not entirely capture the sense in which we all live in a transnational era today. Bernal (2004:4) proposes that “whether we consciously decide to or not, whether we migrate or whether we choose to embrace a comparatively immobile lifestyle, the circulation of ideas, capital and people changes the nature of everybody’s existence”. These transient, short-lived transfers of information and experiences are noted by Morokvasic (2004:9) in his understanding of transnationalism:

The concern of most proponents of transnationalism in migration studies is about *durability* and *sustainability* of transnational links over time, thus excluding phenomena which may be ephemeral, although transnational in essence.

These points are important to note as transnationalism takes place at a variety of influential levels. Cyberspace and the media, for example, are two of the major transnationalist tools which allow individuals, especially those who may not be able to travel physically between nations, the opportunity to influentially project and develop transnational imaginaries. The influence of media and cyberspace on people’s lifestyles and individuality may be harder to statistically measure than border crossing. However, as Bernal (2004) suggests, as people move and cross paths with others, ideas spread, initiatives circulate and the “local” becomes a complex stage on which intricate and multi-faceted identities are played out. The idea of the “local” being associated with a pure and uncontaminated space is subject to scrutiny and examination, as Fox (1991:199) states in an article titled “Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present”:

No longer can they assume as they approach the local, they approach something more elementary, more contingent, and thus more “real” than seen in larger scale perspectives ...for individuality and identity is tied up with images, ideas and opportunities that come from elsewhere.

African nations are constituents of transnationalism as much as any other states today. Images, ideas and opportunities are on offer to the world through a variety of mediums so that even those in the poorest of countries have access to at least some of the methods by which transnational

images, ideas and opportunities are spread (and this is evident in many rural areas too).

Considering transnational practice between various Africa countries and abroad today, it is of interest to consider some of the foreign investment dealings taking place in Africa to date.

Speaking at the *China – Africa Colloquium* held at Rhodes University in September 2009, Hannah Edinger (2009), an Economist at the Centre for Chinese Studies at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa, noted that Beijing's entrance into Africa, particularly the extractive mining sector in Africa, has been significant. China's role as a large-scale infrastructure financier as well as its interest in Africa's extractive industries, plays a role in facilitating transnational movement between Africa and abroad. In her lecture Edinger (2009) addressed China's potentially pivotal role in the development and economic diversification efforts of African countries. Edinger (2009) noted that one interesting and significant way in which China has facilitated access to, from and in-between markets, is through the 'East-West Corridor', a railway line which effectively transfers resources out of Africa's copper belt. This 'East-West Corridor' has meant a moving away from 'North-South' trade relations previously instigated by the West. Edinger (2009) believes that in time the 'East-West Corridor' will most likely dominate over the North- South method of moving resources, substantially reducing transportation costs¹³.

No longer are Western ideas necessarily perceived to be superior to other schools of thought as have previously been considered by some in the past. Transnational associations, as in the example above, presents new information for dealing with challenges so that "comfort zones" of thought are not generated but consistently undermined and questioned by new ideas and different

¹³ China has been among the fastest growing economies in the world, with a real GDP growth rate averaging 9.8% between 1980 and 2006. In the *China – Africa Colloquium* held at Rhodes University in September 2009, Edinger (2009) noted that swift modernisation and development, coupled with a deeper presence in global markets, has upped Beijing's demand for various natural resources as the industrial structure of the nation has developed. Edinger's lecture addressed the way in which China has announced mega-investments in Africa's extractive industries sector to the value of several billions of dollars, supported largely by the Export-Import Bank of China, China Development Bank and the newly created China-Africa Development Fund. Linked to resource investments are large amounts of capital for mining infrastructure development and refurbishments. (Development and refurbishments such as dam and power projects, transport infrastructure as well as social infrastructure.)

problem solving strategies. Transnational activities and relations are progressively operating on the metaphor of a movable stage where, communication, confrontation, challenge and change is perceived to be a progressive route to improvement (Ong 1999).

In the next section I introduce the notion of Afrocentricism, a view which emphasizes the importance of African people, often perceived as a single group and sometimes equated with “Black” American people, in culture, philosophy, and history. The roots of Afrocentrism extend from a reaction to the repression of “Black” people throughout the Western and Eurocentric world in the 19th century. I consider the relativity of the term in a contemporary African reality, critiquing whether the term serves to strengthen views of contemporary Africa or rather promotes a simplistic line of cultural legacy in Africa which does not seem to exist.

i) Afrocentricism

Afrocentricism has re-emerged in recent years as a pivotal issue in the debate over multiculturalism and diversity. It is intricately related to questions of culture, identity and history. The central theme of Afrocentric movement is a reconstruction of an African orientated world-view amongst African Americans.
(Cobb, Jr. 1997:122)

The Afrocentric movement came about as a response to historical Western domination of Africa. Believing that Eurocentric injustices distorted the knowledge of Africans and their cultures, the movement was constructed to empower Africans and encourage African people to take pride in their African history, heritage and culture. I discuss this theory to give background history to the way in which prominent individuals in African history have attempted to empower African people. This African-centred theory is controversial and is important to bear in mind in relation to the way in which Veleko and Payne chose to facilitate African empowerment. The Afrocentric movement is, to a great extent, African-centred and pays little consideration to how countries

outside the Africa may positively influence the African continent. Payne and Veleko use transnational and transcultural links, associations between South Africa and abroad, to enhance and complicate a sense of African identity.

Examining Afrocentric theory it is important, from the onset, to remain sensitively attuned to the history of inequity and discrimination from which this theory originated in the USA. From this stance I assess the meaning of Afrocentricism, the proposed methods of the movement (centrism, critical analysis, and empowerment) toward power redistribution and the credibility of this notion from a transnational perspective.

In an article titled *The Evolution of Africanology: An Afrocentric Appraisal*, James Conyers draws on the writing of Molefi Kete Asante (a key philosopher on Afrocentricism) to define the term *Afrocentricity*. Conyers (2004:641) notes that, for Asante, *Afrocentricity* is

The most complete philosophical totalization of the African being-at-the centre of his or her existence. It is not merely an artistic or literary movement. Not only is it an individual or collective quest for authenticity, but it is above all the total use of method to affect [sic] psychological, political, social, cultural, and economic change. The Afrocentric idea is beyond decolonising the mind.

Stephen Howe (1998: 1) in his book titled *Afrocentricism: Mythical Pasts and Imagined Homes* suggests that Afrocentricism, in more yielding terms represents little more than a means of accentuating the importance of shared African origins among all “black” persons. Howe (1998:1) goes on to note that the movement, encourages “African- Americans” to take pride in their African history, heritage and culture – believing that Eurocentric prejudice has choked-up and warped the knowledge of Africans and their cultures.

In previous sections of this chapter I have drawn attention to the ways in which Eurocentric biases have manipulated the lens and influenced the way that Africa has been and continues to be displayed to the rest of the world. Inducing an African-centred movement is a positive move towards stepping out of a period of messy injustice, and constructing an African reality concerned with psychological, political, social, cultural and economic empowerment of Africans (Conyers 2004:641). Presenting this movement theoretically on paper is obviously much easier than displaying it in effective practice, and it is this point which leads me to apprise some of the endeavours of Afrocentricism.

In an article titled *Why Write Black?: the Role of Afrocentric Discourse in Social Change*, Stefa Dei (1998: 203) considers the materialization of Afrocentricity noting,

Historically, Afrocentric knowledge emerged as a critical, political, and academic discourse to respond to a specific problem: the devaluation of African identities and experiences in the school system, which contributed to the problem of Black students' disengagement from school.

Responding to “black” students' disinterest in school, Afrocentricists sort to alter the educational system in the USA, a structure which Richardson, in an article titled *Critique on the Problematic of Implementing Afrocentricity into Traditional Curriculum* (2000: 197) considered to be,

Traditionally Eurocentric, advancing the idea that the only kind of education that [would] lead to success in today's highly technological world must be grounded in the Eurocentric orientation to knowledge.

Afrocentricists have influentially tackled the prejudices of a Eurocentric education system, believing that “African scholars can never hope to achieve intellectual, cultural, or political liberation by following in Eurocentric footsteps” (Asante: 1983: 11). The Afrocentric movement has questioned the theories of a dominant society and required citizens to be critical of any

educational system which works to uplift one dominant group while inadvertently oppresses another sect of the community (Richardson: 2000: 196).

While this seems positive in theory, Afrocentricity is also considered to have certain shortcomings. Resolutely aiming to improve the experiences and realities of Black Americans in a seemingly European and subjective world, William Cobb in *Out of Africa: The Dilemmas of Afrocentricity* (1997:128) argues that Afrocentricity in theory “consists of interpretation and analysis from the perspective of African people as subjects rather than objects on the fringe of European experience”. There is an underlying supposition that in order to restore fairness and lack of prejudice a “meaningful and authentic study of peoples of African descent must begin and proceed with Africa as the centre, not periphery; as subject, not object” (Conyers: 2004: 641). There is a sense here that the Afrocentric theory may have a tendency to be somewhat essentialist in its attempts to empower Africans. Placing Africans at the centre of humanity is not an even-handed, impartial or progressive way of supporting African growth and development, particularly in regard to initiating and strengthening relations between other countries.

This theoretical viewpoint forms part of many texts which claim to place Africa at the centre. Yet in *Afrocentrism: Mythical Pasts and Imagined Homes* Stephen Howe (1998: 13) writes,

Few of the Afro-American cultural nationalists who loudly proclaim their identification with Africa have seemed to evince a close or informed interest in the continent itself, or have played any major or constructive role in the political campaigns against apartheid, let alone against state repression in postcolonial Africa or on behalf of the victims of genocide in Rwanda and famine elsewhere. Their Africa – as Stuart Hall’s comment implies, as many critics have complained – is an imaginary place, without a real human history... as well as without present: not only without hunger, military coups, gender inequality and

genocide, but equally without TV stations or traffic jams, human rights movements and contemporary artistic creativity.

While the Afrocentric model claims to “subjectify” Africa and its people, the theory may be perceived by some to be merely using the continent’s “baggage” and historical discord as a means to air and boost the views of African-Americans. Howe’s (1998: 13) viewpoint is a controversial issue and one open to debate. His (Howe 1998:13) writing implies that many Afrocentric writers speak of and for a continent they seem to know little about; using Africa as a platform to stage the empowerment of previously disadvantaged Americans. Considering this viewpoint in relation to others however, the writers in this field tread on delicate, controversial ground in their endeavours to uplift people of Africa.

The “Africa” that Afrocentric activists seem to draw upon, is an Africa considered in terms of historical accounts and records of the past. In the book *Black Cultural Traffic: Crossroads in Global Performance and Popular Culture*, Paula Ebron (2005:306) notes that “cultural production” and “traffic” in Africa commingle in the instance of remembering:

To people found throughout the diaspora, particularly those in North America who link their histories to the Atlantic slave trade, the sense of Africa is kept alive through a set of contingent “rememberances.” These images and feelings are continually invoked through the rubric of performance: style, presence, and performative genres that are spoken about over and over again as links to Africa.

Ebron’s (2005:306) book chapter examines the way in which different types of encounters influence cultural productions which in turn generate divergent alliances. Due to the fluidity of cultural production, terms such as “blackness” are understood (and perhaps performed) differently in different contexts (Ebron 2005:306). The term “African” in the label “African-American” similarly, may be considered differently from different perspectives. While the term

“African-American” may be considered problematic for some individuals as it provides constant prompting of lineage, a journey that began in Africa and through slavery incited the undermining of “African-Americans” in America, for other “African-American” individuals the term may be a way of looking to a glorified African past. A matter worth considering is that many “African-American” individuals today, for the most part, reside in America and have little to do with contemporary African realities. Were African-Americans to trace their heritage to Africa, they would discover a very different reality compared with their idea of the one their forefathers left, and the one which is cherished from an Afrocentric perspective. “African” in the term “African-American” tends to link to a redundant Africa that no longer exists, and may be an unconstructive and problematic way of categorising individuals. William Cobb in his article titled *Out of Africa: The Dilemmas of Afrocentricity* (1997: 123) writes,

In this context the African and American represent two juxtaposed identities struggling for control of the collective psyche of the black community. They are two “warring ideals” refereed by a hyphen. Just as some blacks fled from the stigma of Africanity and plunged wholeheartedly into an acceptance fantasy of Americanism, many Afrocentrics constructed alternate identities as descendants of feudal African monarchs. While this quest for self-identification is laudable, it can veer into a type of blacker-than-thou orthodoxy. But even with its flaws, Afrocentricism is more than “a way to rediscover a lost cultural identity- or even invent one that never quite existed,” as Henry Louis Gates dismissed it.

The insinuation implied by Cobb (1997) here is that the Afrocentric model does not seem to encourage the construction of different forms of African-ness. Rather it persuades an African identity which centres itself on a new, reformed idea of a type, defining a “collective psyche” of black individuals and a new style of blackness.

Afrocentric writers claim to be trying to make “African- American” people the subjects of their reality, and could be considered to be using past ideals of Africa to do this. The Afrocentric

model seems to be concerned with exploring cultural identities once lost in the past, and in doing this may be perpetuating the idea of Africa as frozen and African people congealed into mere objects of the past. Using an African histories as a point of progression and foundation, Afrocentric writers seem to disregard contemporary Africa altogether, giving it little recognition beyond a capacity to house past atrocities. If the Afrocentric approach is, to quote Asante (1990:14), “about examining human knowledge from an African-centred perspective” then Africa and its contemporary reality should hold a place in the core of this movement. As Mary Nooter Roberts and Allen. F. Roberts in their book *Memory: Luba Art and the making of History* (1996:30) note, memory of the past shapes the present which in turn forms the future in a linked relationship that is not always clear-cut. The past, present and future of Africa cannot be easily separated and therefore any model which deals with Africa’s history should, to some extent, consider the present and future of African countries.

While it is understandable that Afrocentric writing tends to focus on the past, there is a need for writers to consider reforming an African existence. I critique Asante’s (1990: 134) belief that, “to put ourselves once again on the front pages of our own history and culture we need to re-establish the organic nature of our own voice, the unity of our African culture”. These words could be considered to be a little essentialist; Africa is full of rich, diverse cultural identities which are in a dynamic process of continual change. Perhaps it would be more advantageous to view African cultures as engaged in practices which are continually changing. It seems more accurate to consider customs as traditions which are subject to framing and reframing, appropriation and reappropriation, invention and reinvention in a contemporary framework, rather than in terms of rediscovering a lost culture in Africa. The point I make here is that contemporary Africa is in the process of transnationalism, cultural identities are free to transform and be reconstructed. It is important to remain attentive to the idea that cultures in Africa are

constantly blending and recreating new contemporary cultures. William Cobb (1997: 131) critically argues that it is not helpful to look into Africa's past with the idealistic perspective of finding roots and purity of a culture,

Within the strain of Afro-centric thought, a romantically ideal version of African history is used to supplant the historical mythology of Europeans. In seeking to destroy Euro-centrism, many Afro-centrists have actually emulated it.

Examining Cobb's (1997) writing and his proposed "Dilemmas of Afrocentricity," it is apparent that in creating centralist viewpoints, Afrocentric writers, whilst trying to advocate the previously disadvantaged, tend to paradoxically place themselves in the position of discounting and marginalising the truths they mean to reveal. Enwezor (1999: 271) in his article "Between Worlds: Postmodernism and African Arts in the Western Metropolis" comments on the setbacks of Afrocentricism, writing:

Entrenchment into a dogmatic African essentialism entraps us all and ignores the real commitment of many artists who wish to see such dogmas dismantled, [one should be] cautious against an Afrocentric essentialism that obdurately refuses to look to new texts in advancing its arguments, an important point that the Africanist academia must carefully take to heart. Events such as the Venice Biennale, where African artists can only participate as guests of invited European countries, make it imperative that academia be vigorously challenged to open up its doors to new terrains of critical practice. Culture, though predicated on the ideal, the whole and the pure, is of course never those things. And neither are the artists upon whom the mantle of representing culture falls... It seems ridiculous to constantly translocate contemporary [and African-Americans] back to cultural milieux with which they have very little engagement.

Afro-centrists may be considered to have overlooked parts of their faction which have, to quote William Cobb (1997:129), drifted into a "self-indulgent demagoguery". Critics should not neglect the positive aspects of Afrocentricism, it has achieved recognition and some validity in

addressing the problem of Afro-American educational outcomes, but it is equally important to consider the pitfalls of the movement. As Asante (1983: 15) notes:

The receiver who fails to interrupt an incorrect view in order to achieve some other purpose causes a communication problem. Thus, most creative solutions to the intercultural communication estrangement are in our hands.

The primary objective of Afrocentricism is to “counter the Eurocentric mythology and present a more balanced perspective of history and culture” (Cobb: 1997:125) and I would argue the movement to be successful in making an important step towards a reformed outlook. This outlook tends to reflect a reverse tip in the scales and does not support a balanced perspective, however it is one step closer to reaching a more reasonable standpoint. As Stefa Dei in *Why Write Black?: The Role of Afrocentric Discourse in Social Change* (1998: 203) perceptively notes,

Afrocentricity does well to challenge Eurocentricity as the only valid and legitimate way of knowing about our world. The movement offers a radical discursive critique of subjugation of non-White peoples’ experiences and histories by Eurocentricism(s). Such a critique is the only way to subvert White privilege.

Dei’s (1998: 203) later assertion however may be considered to be slightly problematic. Dei (1998:203) writes “with [regards] Afrocentricity, each of the many origins [sources] of knowledge is a centre [and] having multiple centres diffuses the power of a sole dominating/ hegemonic worldview”. This statement may seem positive in theory, but in practice Afrocentric models tend to place blackness at the centre, subtly marginalising people of colour who are perhaps not black, or have a different idea of what it means to be black. The world is moving away from the idea of a centre/periphery relationship. In an article titled *Museums of Modern Art and The End of History*, Stuart Hall (2001:21) notes that although theorists have been arguing for a while about the idea of a centre versus a periphery in terms of the nationalities of modern artists, important movements are sometimes developed in the centre, but the most exciting occur

where the centre and the periphery interconnect. South Africa is in the process of incorporating and integrating diverse ideas of what it means to be African and black today. These realities do not fit neatly into a constructed nucleus or an African-centred view, rather they feed off many ideas of Africa. As Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall (2004: 351) in their article *Writing the World from An African Metropolis* note,

Africa, like everywhere else, has its heres, its elsewheres, and its interstices (emplacement and displacement). Indeed, historically the continent has been and still is a place of flows, of flux, of translocation, with multiple nexuses and entry and exit points. As evinced by numerous recent studies, the continent we have in mind exists only as a function of circulation and of circuits. It is fundamentally in contact with elsewhere....¹⁴

Contemporary Africa is an environment of interactive multiplicity. There is no central African reality to be identified or confirmed; realities are intermingled, incorporating aspects from “here” and “elsewhere” (Mbembe and Nuttall 2004: 351) which are subject to continual alteration, transformation and readjustment. Afrocentricism is an important exercise in self-naming, a way of moving away from an American elite perspective, yet having said this, Afrocentric scholars should be cautious to avoid narrow-minded “feel-goodism” and thereby continue the construction of cultural hierarchies (Cobb 1997: 131). In a culturally plural society all individuals must have the full right to decide for themselves how to define their identity, as well as the manner in which they locate it. The recognition of an identity should not be dependent on identification with the cultures an individual originated from. Neither should it be defined by a faction that claims to encompass a sense of African legitimacy and “authenticity.” Artists Veleko and Payne incorporate transnational links into their identities. Their personal acknowledgements

¹⁴ In this passage from Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall, ‘Writing the World from an African Metropolis,’ *Public Culture* Vol. 16, no. 3 (2004: 351), the authors cite Abdoumalik Simone, ‘On The Worlding Of African Cities,’ *African Studies Review* Vol. 44 No. 2 (2001: 15-42)

of transnational connections add complexity to their African identities so that the idea of an “authentic” African identity is discharge and rendered out-dated.

In the next section of this chapter, I introduce the notion of Orientalism and I refer to this term using Foucault’s concept of enframing (Stoler: 1995) to link dominant ideas of Afrocentricism and Orientalism. This idea of enframing is a way of describing how a group of people are constructed to be seen. The notion of Orientalism has been constructed from a position of cultural (Western) hierarchy in attempt to legitimate and authenticate the Asian other/ outsider and has determined how others, outside the West have been defined and propagated. This notion gives background history to the representation of the Asian other and is interesting to consider when studying the work of Veleko and Payne, as both artists draw on notions of Chinese and Japanese representation in their work.

ii) **Orientalism: The Enframing of the Other.**

Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient- dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it; in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient (Said 1978:3).

Linnea Dietrich in *Orientalism’s Interlocutors: Painting, Architecture and Photography* (2004:31) supposes that the attitude of Orientalism was formed in the 19th century or even earlier. Dietrich (2004:31) notes that the term Orientalism sums up the way in which

Europeans through their own process of self-definition [considered] non-Western, particularly Near and Middle Eastern peoples. These Near and Middle Eastern peoples were understood to be exotic, erotic, pagan, and even lazy and dirty... always the Other.

This attitude, which is explored fully in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), is still prevalent today. The notion of Orientalism is responsible for critical misunderstandings between East and West. My consideration of Orientalism here cultivates the basis for a later engagement with contemporary understandings of the "East"/ "West" binary. In the second chapter of this thesis, I consider how contemporary arts and culture are in the process of constructing a network that is interrelating "East" and "West". In preparation for this discussion, I feel it is important to consider the work of Edward Said whose influential text *Orientalism* (2003) has unveiled the way in which "Western" domination and hegemony has heavily influenced global perceptions of the "East". There has been a frequent and popular Western tendency to view the "East" in rather simplistic, essentialist, static and one-dimensional terms. Beyond the borders of the West, is the region commonly perceived as the "East". The perception of this "Eastern" region seems to suffer from very confused relationships between Arab states, broadly and collectively merged from a Western perspective. Global perceptions of the "East" have been particularly influenced and further propagated by recent events such as September 11, 2001¹⁵.

Said (1978: 20) notes that early Orientalist tradition of European writing can be observed in the writing of Homer and Aeschylus, whose work contributed towards "creating" the orient. In a play written by Aeschylus' titled *The Persians*, for example, Said (1978:21) notes how the Orient is altered from a very distant, remote and often menacing Otherness into figures that are somewhat familiar, such as a grieving Asiatic woman. The staged immediacy of representation in *The Persians*, Said (1978:21) writes, "obscures the fact that the audience is watching a highly artificial enactment of what non-Oriental has made into a symbol for the whole Orient". In a

¹⁵ On September 11, 2001 an Islamist group known as the Al-Qaeda coordinated a series of suicide attacks upon the United States. Al-Qaeda terrorists hijacked four commercial passenger airliners. The hijackers intentionally crashed two of the planes into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, killing everyone on board and many others working in the buildings.

publication edited by Alexander Lyon Macfie titled *Orientalism: A Reader*, Said (2000: 4) notes that,

In the process (of writing), the author assists in the creation of a series of stereotypical images, according to which Europe (the West, the 'self') is seen as being essentially rational, developed, humane, superior, authentic, active, creative, and masculine, while the orient (the East, the 'other') (a sort of surrogate, underground version of the West (or the 'self') is seen as being irrational, aberrant, backward, crude, despotic, inferior, inauthentic, passive, feminine and sexually corrupt.

The 'orientalist' illegitimatises Said mentions here work to craft the concept of what Said (2000: 4) terms an 'Arab mind', an 'oriental psyche' and an 'Islamic Society' which together function to control and organize the orient – all the while sustaining European imperialism and colonialism. This essentialist study of Asian cultures by the West developed "distinct qualities" or "natures" which set apart Asian culture from Western culture (Said: 2000: 4). These "natures" are described by Said, in Macfie's *Orientalism: A Reader* (2000:90) to be "certain habits of mind, traits of character, and idiosyncrasies of history and temperament" which allow the "West" to make informed decisions in characterising Orientals and justifying their actions. Richard King (2000:340) in Macfie's *Orientalism: A Reader* notes, "As educated Westerners they (considered themselves to be) "better placed" than the Indians themselves to understand, classify and describe Indian culture". This idea of the West being well-versed in foreign cultures – and therefore in an improved position to speak for those cultures is one example of Western culture considering itself to be superior to other cultures. The West has viewed Western imposition in Africa and Asia, which has subsequently come to be termed colonialism and orientalism respectively to be beneficial, a way of bringing superior Western civilization to the rest of the world.

iii) The *Land of the Orient*

In his paper titled “Journey to the East: Ways of Looking at the Orient and the Question of Representation” Bozdogan (1988: 38) notes that the Orient covers an expansive region, “covering the lands from Asia Minor to Japan,” the stretch is regularly considered from a European-centred perspective to be “sub-divided into a near-, a middle- and a far- East” (Bozdogan 1988: 38). Bozdogan argues that, “within the Orientalist construct, Western representation not only installs the otherness of the East, but pays attention to doing this with an intelligible, institutional and authoritative format” (Bozdogan 1988: 40). Sub-dividing the region may, at times have been argued by the West to be logical for the purpose of “study” but as Dirlik (1996: 97) notes in “Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism”, the West has “culturally essentialised” the East – by ignoring differences within individual societies and grouping common characteristics, whole regions have come to be labelled as “oriental”. Describing this format of categorizing, Bozdogan (1988: 40) uses the term “enframing,” coined by Foucault, stating that “enframing” sets up an “order of things”...it introduces a structural or taxonomic base which allows what is looked at to be analyzed, dissected and categorically comprehended”. This act of “enframing,” (which can be linked to stereotyping) robs the inhabitants of the nation being “enframed” of a sense of individuality and humanity. The worth of these people lies in their ability to represent difference – to show off their culture that some might consider to be unusual if viewed against a Western backdrop. The West is then able to effortlessly categorize that which is foreign and dissimilar as other. This “otherness” is disseminated to be everything the West is not. The “other” is therefore viewed as barbaric, as something of interest for the purpose of study and displayed on a plinth for the common westerner to view at a price. Bozdogan (1988: 41) reflects upon the work of Said (1978), noting how “enframing” filters into representation,

The Orient viewed as an object “out there” is reduced in representation to a picture- a picture of the Orient and not the Orient. Once again, it is

“enframed” as an autonomous depiction, dislocated from the worldliness of the situation and complete in itself. Paradoxically these are frequently the most elaborately rendered and finished pictures. They have a remarkable accuracy of detail and almost photographic realism by which they make an apparent claim to the very reality from which they have withdrawn in the onset. This is the appearance of reality. The accuracy and life-likeness of the picture lends it credibility, authority and a claim to the truth even of the most fantastic and imaginary constructions.

In a section of her paper titled “The Image as Object of Consumption,” Bozdogan argues that “the reduction of reality into representation... dissociates the image from the context in which it is situated. The image “enframed” as such can now be reproduced, multiplied, transported elsewhere and reconstructed ultimately to become an object of consumption” (Bozdogan 1988: 42). This issue concerning the reproduced image, a representation disseminated to speak for a whole, also became a contentious matter with regard to Africa during and post colonisation. In his essay titled “Indians and Negroes” W. E. B. Du Bois (1963) draws attention to the way in which the West has propagated notions of Western superiority through education. Du Bois (1935) finds the Western education system problematic and disputes that the Western canon distorts the education of races in order to uphold its racist imperialist grasp. Du Bois disputes that Negroes taught in American Schools, reading books and articles by American writers have almost no conception of the history of India, what they acquire in short, is a genie’s lamp of derogatory and distorted myth. In contrast, the understanding that Indians have of the American Negro is chiefly confined to the conventional story spread by most white American and English writers: ignorant black savages were enslaved and made to do labour which was the only thing they could do. Du Bois blamed modern methods of gathering and distributing news and deliberate and purposeful propaganda for these insights.

Peoples of African and Asian descent have found themselves in mutual struggle against Western empires. Everything seems to be determined by the Western World, and to be different from the West is an unfortunate birthing. Stereotypical images of Asia are in fact very similar to the ones constructed to represent Africa which, as Bozdogan (1988: 39) notes “reduce the actual complexity and diversity of the (Other) into a set of two opposing pairs”. The West, Bozdogan (1988: 39) notes has presented itself as “being rational (and) the East (as) emotional/ spiritual.” I would argue that in a similar manner Africa has been fabricated by the West to be physical and or impulsive. “The West” Bozdogan (1988: 39) argues “is the dynamic world of action, the East, the static world of contemplation; the West represents progress and civilization, the East seems to be synonymous with that which is stagnant” (Bozdogan: 1988: 39). Considering these binaries it is interesting to note that Asia is the largest region with more people in China than any country in the world. Africa, for example is the second largest continent with over 50 countries, yet these continents are still spoken of as if they were pitiable, minor countries. Africa is still problematically thought of as a country. It is ridiculous to think that these geographic landmasses occupy such vast proportions of the world, yet they are considered to be different and strange and unable to adequately measure up to Western society.

Binaries such as “East” and “West” propagate the idea that Africa and the “East” are very detached from the West – far removed, literally and figuratively from the sphere of Western culture. It is precisely this detachment which has turned the unfamiliar into the “other,” prejudicing that which was considered to be culturally “different” into the stereotype of “undeveloped”. The Orient has been written into history by the West, ear-marked to play the passive role of inertia. Through submission to Western myths, the Orient has “accepted” this position, and this acceptance is seen from a Western perspective to “legitimise” Eastern association with Western feminine stereotypes of the time (Macfie 2000: 338). Africa and Asia

have essentially been reproduced to appear weaker and of lower standing in relation to the West, they are, to quote Said (1978:308) “static, frozen, fixed eternally [and denied] the very possibility of development, transformation and human movement”.

The Western Orientalist construction of the “Other” is a mechanism which has enfolded Africans and Asians “into the same discursive trap of mutual subordination and separation” (Mullen 2004: xv). In his book *Orientalism*, Said (1978:34) refers to the link between Asian and African domination, noting that Orientalism is a branch of the same enterprise as colonialism.

Considering this, it is fair to argue that Orientalism is an effective way to sum up Western representation of marginalized groups. The Western Orientalist construction of the Other, was basically a mechanism applied broadly to continue European hegemony and as Partha Mitter argues in her article titled “Western Orientalism and the Construction of Nationalist Art in India” (1995:140), Said’s investigation of the term has opened up the space of exchange and created an opportunity for the side of the colonised (both Asian and African) to be heard.

Considering the notion of Orientalism to be an instrument or mechanism used to continue European hegemony, it is of interest to consider the analogy of Zachary Lockman who, in his book titled *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History of Politics of Orientalism* (2004:1985) notes:

Put very crudely, [Orientalist] discourse might be likened to a pair of eyeglasses we unconsciously wear which acts as a filter that determines how what we take to be reality looks like to us, what we see [or do not see] and how we see it, foregrounding certain things and rendering other things invisible and determining what the things we do see mean to us.

In “From Orientalism to Global Sociology” Turner (2000: 373) writes “the anthropological gaze should be also directed towards the otherness of Western culture in order to dislodge the privileged position of dominant Western cultures”. I argue that this “eye for an eye” view is

destructive and futile in a transnational reality in which East and West are no longer identifiable. Turner (2000: 372) draws on the binaries of Orientalist discourse (we *versus* them, East *versus* West, rationality *versus* irrationality) arguing that “an alternative to orientalism is a discourse of sameness that would emphasise the continuities between various cultures rather than their antagonisms”. This outlook may also be problematic as the idea of sameness is too simplistic and one-dimensional to use as an instrument tackle the complexities of national realities. The creation of the Orient generated a false idea of the East, and by integrating similarities of that which has previously been presented and narrativised to be outside into Western culture threatens the West with what Mullen (2004:43) terms as “a dislocation from itself”.

Conclusion

The voices of the people living in Asia need to be heard so that their experiences are not relayed from a Western perspective. There is also a need to connect with inter-cultural realities which, as Dirlik (1996:118) notes do not try to engage with “a reified past legacy, but a present of [existing, material] everyday cultural practices” so that it is no longer possible to differentiate or identify what is Western from what is non-Western. In chapter two I introduce two artists operating in South Africa, Nontsikelelo ‘Lolo’ Veleko and Tracy Payne who absorb the possibilities of inter-cultural realities into their South African individualities. Complicating the idea of the “East” and Said’s notion of *Orientalism* (1978), Nontsikelelo ‘Lolo’ Veleko’s contemporary existence is formed through an assemblage of veneers, and she uses a sense of contemporary guise to challenge the effectiveness of simplistic data such as “East” and “West” as well as the efficiency of national boundaries in determining identity. Tracy Payne also complicates the notion of *Orientalism* (Said: 1978) and challenges notions of “East” through her paintings. Engaging with concepts of movement, transience and a lack of environmental solidity,

Payne creates a sense of tension between the inactivity of outdated Western perceptions of “East” and the dynamic, vibrancy of a transnational consciousness.

Chapter Two

Imagining Identity: Journeying beyond borders, binaries and stereotypes

Explorations of contemporary art have focused on issues of identity and the porous nature of the boundaries of identities (relating, for instance, to ethnicity, gender, and class) for some time (since Barth 1969). Most investigations of these subjects are performed through an interplay of past and present, juxtaposing historical and contemporary frameworks. In this chapter, I consider the work of South African artists Nontsikelelo Veleko and Tracy Payne who, while incorporating aspects of the past into their realities, also present a third framework for dealing with identity, the framework of possibility. Veleko and Payne operate in transnational/transcultural realities; realities which incorporate elements of movement, prospect, fantasy and vision. Breaking down stereotypes of what it means to operate in “Africa” through transnational engagements with the “East,” Veleko and Payne create a dialogue, where aspects of history, actuality and aspiration are able to merge. This integration interweaves threads from the past and present while also presents ideas for future social, cultural and political possibility.

I) NONTSIKELELO ‘LOLO’ VELEKO

Born in 1977 in Bodibe, North West Province of South Arica, Nontsikelelo ‘Lolo’ Veleko is an innovative photographer and project manager/co-coordinator at the Market Photo Workshop in Johannesburg. Veleko trained in the art of photography at the Market Photo workshop and over the last few years, has generated a great amount of interest through her striking body of work entitled *Beauty is in the eye of the Beholder* (2003). A nominee and finalist of the MTN New Contemporary Artists in 2003, Veleko has since been participating in significant local and international exhibitions. In 2005 and 2006 her photographs were exhibited in the renowned

exhibition *Snap Judgements : New Positions in Contemporary African Photography* (2006) at the International Centre of Photography in New York and in *Personae Scenarios-the New African Photography* (2005), Brancolini Grimaldi Arte Contemporanea in Rome. Veleko has also recently participated in well publicized exhibits such as *Click* (2005) at the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg and *Unsettled:8 South African Photographers* (2004-2006) in Denmark, Sweden and South Africa, as well as other exhibitions and projects in Switzerland, the United States and of course at home. In 2008 Veleko was awarded the Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Visual Art and exhibited her work *Wonderland* (2008) at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, South Africa in 2009. In *Wonderland* (2008) Veleko explores the possibilities of combined heritage, mixed tradition and a merging of cultures. Using clothes as critical props to deliberately challenge assumptions of identity based on appearance and historical background, Veleko photographs people on the streets, fashion, graffiti and personal spaces in a manner that challenges South African attitudes and viewpoints.

i) Overt Gesture/ Covert Indication.

Veleko engages with gesture, particularly an overtly theatrical sense of gesture to dramatically open up her prospect of *Wonderland* for viewer participation and engagement. Gesture is a significant tool used by society in communication. It is most often used to support expression, so the individual conversing may be more clearly understood. Kendon (2004:198) notes,

When a speaker is faced with the need to describe the form or size of some object, to talk about spatial relationships between objects, to describe an environment and how one might move about in such an environment, descriptive gestures, rather like drawings or pictures, can achieve adequate descriptions with much greater economy of effort and much more rapidly than words alone can manage.

In the work *Liberty* (2007) [fig. 2.1], in the *Wonderland* exhibition (2008), Veleko's open and extended deportment seems to invoke the sentiment of an open request. Veleko's posture in this

work infers a sense of beckoning, a summons to all viewers – anyone willing to share her space – to release themselves into her *Wonderland* – “a world she views through her camera’s lens... wondering at the mechanisms at play in such a place” (Murinik 2008:10).

The arresting quality of the image as a whole seems to draw the viewer in, and her composed posture seems to encourage deeper reflection – a need to meditate in order to discover a deeper sense of profundity. Complementing her open gesture, Veleko uses the landscape format (instead of the conventional portrait format usually applied to self-portraits) to extend the scene, giving the image a larger than life feel. In her article ‘Spilling Through the Lens’, Murinik (2008:11) insightfully describes this perspective as “stretched”. “Using a horizon camera, Veleko introduces views that offer stretched perspectives... and literally stretch the possibilities of *Wonderland*’s makeup and reality”. Veleko’s arms extend beyond the “landscape” of the frame; her wrists are quite literally cropped by the frame’s boundary, presenting the viewer with a sweeping panoramic image. This gesture could be interpreted as subtle encouragement to contemplate that which is outside of the frame’s enclosure. By reaching out of the frame, Veleko seems to encourage a perspective beyond the one she has created; asking the viewer to consider further angles beyond the ones reflected in her *Wonderland* (2008) series. These extensive, far-reaching elements in Veleko’s work are supported through her “Eastern” (namely Japanese style of) clothing¹⁶, and sketch a deep thread of movement through her work.

In his book *Cutting a Figure: Fashioning Black Portraiture* Richard Powell (2008:19) writes,

The individual and the community greatly depend upon one another for definition and, if not altogether interchangeable, are the partners in the creation of the self.

Veleko's self-portraits are influenced by and reflective of the attitudes at play in the communities of contemporary South African post-Apartheid culture. The legacy of Apartheid generated pent up feelings of dissatisfaction – discontentment of being made subservient through decades of colonisation and deprivation. The younger South African generation, of which Veleko is part, seems to use their expressions in the dominant youth culture to present a sense of detachment from previous views of resentment. Older South Africans have played a part in the struggle for liberation, and younger South Africans recognize new liberation as an opportunity to seek their own renaissance, both politically and culturally. In an article titled *Is Kwaito South African Hip Hop? Why the answer matters and who it matters to*, Sharlene Swartz¹⁷ (2003:2) argues that “Kwaito is in fact the pop music of South Africa by virtue of the fact that black youth comprise 80% of the country's population, are united in their enthusiastic support of it”. Swartz (2003:2) defines Kwaito by drawing on the descriptions of international and non-youth culture journalists, as well as local producers and artists.

Mostly these two groups agree on what kwaito is: a fusion of slowed down European house music played at 90bpm rather than 130 bpm, with a liberal sampling of world music styles such as reggae, soul and ragga. Kwaito artists and producers add more detail to the description however and include piano, percussion, bubblegum (South African disco), *mbaqanga* (stomping jive), *kwela* (penny whistle), and the South African gospel style known as *iscathamiya*. In addition, South African artists are quick to maintain continuity with the past and cite older black South African musicians like Brenda Fassie, Yvonne Chaka Chaka and Chicco as influences.

Kwaito is establishing itself as an eclectic unique youth sub culture, creating an

¹⁷ Swartz. S. 2003. 'Is Kwaito South African Hip Hop? Why the answer matters and who it matters to.' Retrieved on October 12, 2009. From: [www.theyouthinstitute.org](http://www.theyouthinstitute.org/pubs/Is%20Kwaito%20South%20African%20Hip%20Hop.pdf); <http://www.theyouthinstitute.org/pubs/Is%20Kwaito%20South%20African%20Hip%20Hop.pdf>

identity for young post apartheid black South Africans. Swartz (2003:11) highlights an interesting feature of kwaito music, describing the multiplicity of languages used – she notes “everything from Zulu, Sotho and *tsotsitaal* (township slang) finds a place in kwaito. Everything that is, except English, which has historical significance. When kwaito artists sing and chant in indigenous South African languages, they reverse the cultural hegemony of English”. Kwaito forms part of a contemporary South African youth culture which borrows a variety of inter-cultural artifacts to modify a South African sense of self. Kwaito has distinctive meaning and purpose in the lives of young black South Africans, indeed for all South Africans, since it reorganises the hierarchy of dominance, by incorporating those who have been previously excluded and by shifting the balance and influence of previous power relations in South African history (Swartz 2003: 8).

Veleko’s *Wonderland* (2008) exhibition operates in this unfastened and open state of mind. Communicating a sense of unrestraint through distinctive style, Veleko’s liberal sampling of a variety of notions and artefacts opens up a gateway for quirky interpretation and reinterpretation. Her work forms part of an eclectic style of arts and culture operating in South Africa at present. An approach which turns on an axis of social change, offering up a crossbreed of diverse styles for inclusion, exclusion or opposition; an outlook which seems to be shaping and articulating the identities of a generation of young South Africans in a refreshingly open and fluid way.

ii) Fashion: Self-styling and role-play.

Using fashion as a tool to destabilise certain constricted views in society, Veleko dresses in Martial Arts attire, which most viewers would associate with the “East,” not Southern Africa at

all. Studying Veleko's self-portraits, the viewer may be prompted to question why an African woman such as Veleko would portray herself in Eastern dress. Veleko's subjectivity traverses a space wider than the one she, as a black South African woman would have been afforded during Apartheid times, and as a result she seems to have experienced some inquiring viewer responses to her work. She explains, 'a lot of people are still dumbfounded and do not know what to make of a black girl in a kimono performing some kind of Martial Arts'¹⁸. This reaction seems to be testimony to the viewer's expectations, which immediately regards some roles as suitable and others as out of place, especially, for example where there are conflicting interventions of race and/or gender. Some roles seem to be typically reserved for certain "types" of people. Perhaps it is this lack of fit that indicates a critical fracture in the viewer's outlook, reflecting back on the viewer his/her own presumptions as to who should, could or ought to fit the silhouette of a prearranged group.

This tension here prompts the reader of the work to recognise the facade at play in every portrait photograph, and thus to question the idea of the photograph as an indicator of authenticity and 'truth'. For Roland Barthes every photograph of the self is already an act of mimicry and imitation: caught up in the distress of knowing that one will be duplicated, one can't help posing as an "other". Barthes (1984:10) writes, "once I feel myself observed by the lens [...] I constitute myself in the process of 'posing,' I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image". Thus "I do not stop imitating myself, and because of this, [...] I invariably suffer from a sensation of inauthenticity, sometimes of imposture (comparable to certain nightmares)" (Barthes 1984:13).

¹⁸ Personal correspondence with Veleko, 5 August 2007

If the act of posing and mimicing unpicks every portrait from within, undoing its arrangement of “truth,” then it should also clear a space for the reconsidering of identity, not according to the misguided orders of “truth” or “type”, but as a self-directed construct. In *Cutting a Figure: Fashioning Black Portraiture*, Richard J. Powell (2008: 212) argues that self-styling and role-play are among some of the approaches commonly utilised as means of resisting imposed restrictions on identity:

Through self-fashioning, provocative role-play, and other insignia, peoples of African descent and their artistic delineators have slashed away at the fixed boundaries imposed upon their black bodies in the public, predominantly Euro-American arena.

Presenting herself in Martial Arts clothing Veleko enquires, in a nuanced manner, why the image of a black girl in a kimono seems absurd. Her images seem to question whether it is healthy for society to have a fixed format of what it means to be “African” or “Asian”. Questioning such homogenous formulations of identity through *Wonderland*, Veleko encourages her viewers to engage with ideologies outside their enclosed comfort zones – to consciously liberate themselves from the idea of “a type”. By assuming a “borrowed” (Japanese) identity in *Liberty* (2007) [fig. 2.1] Veleko is involved in a double process of othering – posing as herself which is other to itself through mimicry and masking. By deliberately invoking an “Eastern” “type” the work subtly implies that there is a certain amount of mimicry, masking and imitation involved in adhering to the notion of a “type” as no person is able to fit neatly into a constructed category. Although the viewer may be able to recognise the appearance of Veleko in her self-photographs, the viewer is also compelled to recognise what Craig Owens (1992:183) calls “a trembling around the edges of that identity”. The project of finding the “real” Veleko beneath this construction of a “type” is prevented, the viewer loses his/her way amidst the assembled guise. The act of discerning an individual’s “type” (history, lineage, cultural background and/or gender) by external features, the colour of skin, clothing, facial characteristics etc is thwarted and the

viewer is reminded that a “type” is nothing more than a changeable construction of assembled elements.

In *Likeness and Beyond: Portraits from Africa and the World*, Richard Brilliant and Jean Borgatti (1990:15) note, “It is a commonly held assumption that all of us, sooner or later, try to show “what we are (or what we’d like to be) in our faces, our bodies [and] our costumes”. Whether we use our bodies to encourage transformation (be it cultural, social or national) or conservatively dissuade it, Brilliant and Borgatti (1990) argue there are many aspects of the inner self that are best expressed in exterior form. This is true in the case of Veleko, who feels that there are many characteristics of herself that language cannot justly portray and for her, clothing seems to do better justice to these aspects¹⁹. Veleko’s *Wonderland* (2008) exhibition infers that individuality within becomes noticeable on the exterior through the way we choose to express it. Veleko uses her keen eye for fashion, coupled with her performative demeanour to effectively move beyond boundaries – boundaries such as those that define a “type;”²⁰ boundaries of language, and as Foster (1997:103) notes “boundaries of Western subject-object relations.” Fashion, for Veleko is an instrumental way of changing societal conceptions and she uses clothing as a tool to open the channels for communication. Writing on the subject of fashion in Veleko’s work, John Fleetwood (2008: 77) states,

Fashion was important in this series. If you are young in this environment, the clothes you choose to wear become a signpost for your

¹⁹ Personal correspondence with Veleko, 2 September 2008

²⁰ I use the word “type” as defined by the The Oxford English Dictionary (2009), which notes, “a type is a category of people or things perceived to have common characteristics....A person or thing which symbolizes or exemplifies the defining characteristics of something.” This definition can be linked to the word “stereotype” which The Oxford English Dictionary (2009) notes is “a preconceived and over-simplified idea of the characteristics which typify a person or thing.” AskOxford.com. Retrieved on 07, October 2009 from www.askoxford.com: http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/type?view=uk and http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/stereotype?view=uk

personality, the only outlet you have for self-expression and the only strategy you have for actively challenging the identity chosen for you.

For Veleko, fashion and clothing are elements that provide the means for creating an identity, establishing new societal norms and by extension new economic opportunities. After so many years of repression and denigration, fashion provides an exciting way to showcase the realities of contemporary South African-ness. In this sense, fashion is effectively, a lifestyle.

iii) Colourful Expressions in Contemporary Portraiture.

One of the most distinguishable features of Veleko's Chinese/Japanese series, a collection that she integrates into the *Wonderland* exhibition (2008), is the red sash tied around her torso. In *Kimono: Fashioning Culture*, Liza Dalby (1993:249) notes that in Japanese history, the concept of rank was regulated to an extravagantly detailed degree. "Rank" Dalby (1993:249) writes,

Dictated what a person could wear and these codes were carried out primarily in colours in a system adapted from the Chinese court²¹. Men's formal costume indicated the wearer's rank by colour and woman's clothing was constrained by the law of forbidden colours (*kinjiki*), which reserved several shades of red and the colour deep purple to imperial ladies.

The red sash affixed to the waists of Martial Arts competitors of Judo for example, is not a colour usually worn by Martial Arts competitors; it is generally associated with knowledge, status and rank and is very rarely seen²².

²¹ It is important to note here that the history of Japanese dress, particularly the class ranking in system – which is associated with colour – originated, along with many other Japanese cultural aspects, in China.

²² Around 1930 the Kodokan Judo Institute in Tokyo, Japan, created a new belt to recognize the special achievements of high ranking black belts. Jigoro Kano (the founder of judo) chose to recognize sixth, seventh, and eighth degree black belts with a special *obi* made of alternating red and white panels (*kohaku obi*). The white color was chosen for purity, and red for the intense desire to train and the sacrifices made. The colors red and white are an enduring symbol of Japan, and they have been used in Judo since Jigoro Kano started the first Red and White Tournament in 1884. The *kohaku obi* is often worn for special occasions, but it is not required to be worn at any time and the black belt remains the standard for all the *yudansha* ranks. In 1943 the Kodokan created the optional

When asked why she chose this particular colour of sash in her representations, Veleko explains that for her the colour red carries traces and implications of blood, she notes “I often think as human beings no matter how much we think we differ from each other we actually share a similar colour in blood, even if it’s a different type”²³. Blood in this context seems to infer the concept of blood-lines, drawing links between people of different cultures and social standings. Blood also alludes to the continuation of generations, suggesting lineages which raise questions about history and memory.

One artist who engages with intergenerational matrilineal connections and separations is Maria Magdalena Campos- Pons. In a work titled *Umbilical Cord* (1991) [fig. 2.2] Campos- Pons uses marble, carved wood, wire, fabric, soil, and colour photo prints, in a mixed media installation that expressively pays respect to the Afro-Cuban women in the artist's family. *Umbilical Cord* (1991) [fig. 2.2] traces seven women in the matrilineal line, each represented by a photograph of her exposed belly which seems to emphasise the abdomen as the locus of creation and birth and the left arm and hand which symbolically extends as a link to the heart. The photographs are all connected by a cord tied with red cloth, subtly communicating movement of place, memories of a homeland and newly constructed identities in the transnational context²⁴. According to Sally Berger curator of *History of a People who were not Heroes, Part II* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in March 1998, every object, colour, material, sound, shape, and motion in Campos-

red belt to recognize 9th and 10th degree *yudansha*. The Judo Rank System. Retrieved on 17, November 2009 from [www.judoinfo.com: http://www.judoinfo.com/obi.htm](http://www.judoinfo.com/obi.htm)

²³ Personal correspondence with Veleko, Cape Town 5 August 2007

²⁴ Another work of Campos-Pons titled, *China Porcelain: My Mother Told Me I Was Chinese* is interesting to consider when examining notions of homeland and identity construction. In this mixed-media installation Campos-Pons draws from her Chinese ancestry and re-examines early memories to reconcile her family history. While facing herself in a mirror, Campos-Pons places an African Yoruba mask on her head and then removes it – uncovering one layer to reveal another. She then affirms her Chinese heritage by applying a new mask of face make-up in the traditional Chinese theatre style. The paint dries uneven and messy, subtly emphasising a sense of cultural hybridity implying the inexactness of heritage. In this work, Campos-Pons implies that identity is often confined by assumptions of history and heritage, but these aspects can be a fluid and ever-evolving in the re-imagining of self.

Pons' work is charged with personal, sacred, and historical resonance. In an installation walk-through of Campos- Pons' work Berger (March, 1998) notes that,

In accordance with Yoruba tradition, each believer is protected by certain personal Orisha, or gods. These Orisha are signified by specific colours and objects. The colour red of the cloth alludes to Chango, the Yoruba thundergod, and god of passion and creativity.

Reflecting on the colour red and associations it has with generational links, histories and memories, a viewer may perceive the choice of the red sash in *Liberty* (2007) [fig. 2.1] to be a subtle yet important link to memory and atrocity, hinting at the colonial legacy of a racially arrogant period in South African history. The stark, contrast nature in which the colour red is used in *Liberty* (2007) [fig. 2.1] may bring to mind the messy, racial South African history and the blood that was spilled in the violent period of Apartheid. Dick Hebdige in his book *Subculture, the meaning of style* (1979:80) notes that new cultural alterations always launch from a past:

Material that is continually being transformed into culture can never be completely 'raw'. It is always mediated: inflected by the historical context in which it is encountered; posited upon a specific ideological field which gives it a particular life and particular meanings.

In a film titled *Sari Red* (1988) Pratibha Parmar engages with the true life-story of a young Indian woman killed in 1985 in a racist attack in England. The title *Sari Red* is an ominous warning of the threat of violence upon the lives of Asian women in both private and public spheres of the United Kingdom. In this film the red silk of the Sari carries implications of blood that is spilt. Foster (1997: 77) notes of Parmar's film,

Blood and its colour, red, act as shifting signifiers that at once connote memory of what "must not be forgotten," racist sexist violence.... [while simultaneously] denoting positive images... of energy, joy [and] life itself.

In *Liberty* (2007) [fig. 2.1] red similarly seems to conjure up images of a history of bloodshed and violence against the body, yet importantly it also infers new life, new blood-lines and fresh connections to be forged – linking people of an international diasporic community. The red band in the centre of Veleko’s otherwise monotone image *Liberty* (2007) [fig. 2.1] is layered with meaning and is evocative of the Japanese flag [fig. 2.3]. According to ancient Japanese traditions much symbolism is associated with the colours of the Japanese flag,

Red is said to represent hardiness, bravery, strength & valour while the white background is connotative of peace and honesty.... The red dot in the centre of the Japanese flag has long been associated with the sun – which is represented as red and round in Japanese culture. The sun carries much significance in Japan – a country commonly referred to as ‘The Land of The Rising Sun.’ In Japan, the sun and motifs of it are primarily associated with the idea of transformation. The sun is thought to reflect, control, and express changes in values and aspirations – and is seen as a sign of prosperity and renewed life.²⁵

These associations are particularly interesting to notice in relation to Veleko’s work where she focuses on issues of the self – improvement, fulfillment and personal growth – all aspects which are closely linked to the sun.

In a similar manner in which the sun is portrayed as “flat” and design-like on the Japanese flag, Veleko in *Liberty* (2007) [fig. 2.1] also seems “flat” as the representation of her is devoid of dramatic contours and reference to bodily shape. This “flatness” gives the sense of a cut-out image or a Japanese Anime animation character and links to the idea of a comic strip drawing or the comic strip heroine of a wonderland. This sense of imagination is presented in the media

²⁵ Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2009. Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc. Retrieved August 14, 2009 from Encyclopedia Britannica.com: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/300531/Japan>

where iconic figures such as Bruce Lee²⁶ for example, transcends tough circumstances by practising kung fu and karate techniques, and emerges a hero. In this manner martial arts seems to be associated with heroism, progress and a transcendence of physical boundaries. Martial arts therefore seems to be an effective means of portraying boldness and a surpassing of physical boundaries.

Veleko tends to use colours such as red (the sash tied around her torso), black (the martial arts dress) and green (the environment in *Love for Self* (2007) [fig. 2.4]) in her contemporary self-portraits. Perhaps, for Veleko, colour also draws links from past to present. In the same way red draws a reference to a violent past, which led to freedom and has created opportunities for new life and personal growth, green and black may also be symbolic. Considering political undertone in Veleko's work it may be significant to view her work in relation to the symbolism of the South African flag [fig. 2.5]. According to South African government information (2009), the symbolism in the green 'Y' shape in the South African flag can be interpreted as the "convergence of diverse elements within South African society, taking the road ahead in unity."²⁷ The theme of blending and unifying different elements ties into the work of Veleko – where she blends more than just diverse South African elements but transnational elements in her contemporary representations of self.

iv) Beneath the Pose

²⁶ Bruce Lee (1940 – 1973) was a Chinese American and Hong Kong actor, martial artist, philosopher, film director, screenwriter. He is considered by many as the most influential martial artist of the 20th century, and a cultural icon. Retrieved on 16, Novemebr 2009 from wikipedia.org: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruce_Lee

²⁷ South African Government Information. 2009. Retrieved October 08, 2009 from www.info.gov.za: <http://www.info.gov.za/aboutgovt/symbols/flag.htm>

Despite the centrality of the red sash and the “Eastern” martial arts clothing in the image *Liberty* (2007) [fig. 2.1], “clothes alone do not make the man” (Powell: 2008: 145). As Powell (2008:145) describes with regards to the work *Sir Charles, Alias Willie Harris* by painter Barkley. L. Hendricks, “it is attitude – as communicated in expressions, gestures and deportment – that carries [the subject] to a more exalted stage”. Jean Borgatti (1990:8-9) takes this observation one step further, stating that,

Emphasis or exaggeration of certain physical features, depiction of a specific pose or stance... are regarded by those who see and use them as transmitting more information about the true nature of a person than can be given by a superficial likeness.

In her book *Kimono: Fashioning Culture* Liza Dalby (1993:247) notes that in the Heian era of Japanese history (710-1185), a Heian woman’s presence, her aura, was appreciated as an expression of her sensibilities. Dress-up, was seen as a way of displaying cultural refinement which was an accomplished attribute of beauty, even more important than physical aspects of beauty. Pondering this, it is interesting to note that in the Heian period in Japanese history, beauty was recognised as that which is constructed and enacted so as to intrigue and lure the beholder.

The idea of dress-up paired with decorum and a certain degree of pose and enactment holds much symbolism and importance in the lives of women in Japanese history (Dalby 1993:247). Considering this, it is important to consider the way in which pose and dress-up feed off each other and help to communicate the intentions of the individual.

Veleko carefully chooses specific poses which act as signifiers of her innermost passion – Japanese culture. The manner in which Veleko averts her gaze and paints her face in mask in *Love For Self* (2007) [fig. 2.4], subtly evokes the film *Memoirs of a Geisha* (2005). Based on the

novel by Arthur Golden, the film *Memoirs of a Geisha* (2005) is a reminder that the concealment of emotions has long been considered a sign of gentility in Japan. The aversion of the gaze and covering of the mouth when laughing seems to transform the face into “a mask” so as not to reveal inner feelings. This concealment and discretion seems to place Veleko on an elevated stage of propriety, and it is this subtle sense of decorum, which delicately intrigues the viewer, lures him/her to further examine the work.

Powell (2008:222) notes, “portraiture [has] a capacity to peel back the subject’s exteriority and, instead, show the heart, mind, and soul of an individual.” Demeanour, attitude and body movement seem to quickly become inconsequential by nature, yet these aspects constitute the distinctive spirit, temperament and air which all entwine into her individuality.

It is interesting to note here that in a Western context the idea of a mask seems to raise questions of deceit and pretence, as the Oxford English Dictionary²⁸ notes, “a mask is a covering for all or part of the face, worn as a disguise” (2009) yet in Japanese culture the “mask” is associated with a sense of propriety, etiquette and decorum. In an African context a mask is often associated with spiritual transformation, and the connection with the ancestral spirits.

Considering Veleko’s pose in *Liberty* (2007) [fig. 2.1], the viewer may notice that the cropped nature of the frame denies the opportunity to confidently decide whether the subject’s palms are facing upward or downward. Reflecting on an open gesture such as this, Kendon (2004: 248) writes,

Very often... in the Open Hand Supine pose... both hands are moved away from one another, giving the sense that the [individual has] withdrawn from the space... The semantic theme of this gesture is that of the withdrawal of action or of non-intervention.

²⁸ Retrieved October, 15 2009 from: AskOxford.com: http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/mask?view=uk

Denying the viewer access to a neatly contained subject, by extending her arms out of the frame, Veleko leaves her work open to viewer interpretation and questioning. Withdrawing into her own deeper introspections, Veleko's dropped head seems to encourage the viewer to look inwards, to also introspect – and gain a deeper understanding of self and a deeper sense of meaning from her work.

The viewer may be encouraged to further consider Veleko's dropped head, which seems to signify a sense of withdrawal from public contact into a private space. This sense of detachment seems reaffirmed by Veleko's denial of the viewer's gaze as Veleko's hair and head position obscure her eyes from the lens. The emotional gaze of a subject into the lens often has the effect of strengthening an image, as the viewer's ability to read into a subject's eyes often gives a hint of what the subject might have been feeling when he/she was photographed. Richard Brilliant (1990), co-author of *Likeness and Beyond: Portraits from Africa and the World*, notes that artistic distortion and manipulation of physical appearance can make recognition more difficult, and this encourages the viewer to contemplate the possible interpretations of the observed pose in place of any other. Perhaps Veleko chooses to obscure her eyes from the camera in order to draw attention to the dramatic pose of her body. By looking downward, and eliminating any sense of easy recognition, Veleko seems to encourage the viewer into a deeper engagement with the image – reflecting on possible interpretations.

Considering Veleko's gaze here, a link may be drawn to the work of Samuel Fosso²⁹. In a group of colour images from 1997, Fosso appears in a variety of 'types' – in drag, as a sailor [fig. 2.6], in a suit talking on a cell phone [fig. 2.7], and as a pirate clutching a handful of costume

²⁹ Cameroon born photographer, Samuel Fosso has spent most of his life in the Central African Republic. His interest in photography was sparked by a brief apprenticeship to a studio photographer in 1975; whereafter Fosso opened his own photography studio at the age of was thirteen. Since the first international exhibition of his photographs in Mali in 1994, Fosso has participated in several exhibitions including, most recently, *Africa Remix*.

jewellery [fig. 2.8]. Fosso's demonstration of "types" – the businessman [fig. 2.7], the rocker [fig. 2.9], the pirate [fig. 2.8], and so forth – is intrinsically caught up in fiction rather than the assumption of an underlying truth. What is notable here is that in Fosso's self-portraits (1997), his eyes are shielded or partially shielded by sunglasses, spectacles, swimming goggles [fig. 2.10] and a pirate's sash. Even the sailor [fig. 2.6] seems to gaze out above and just to the side of the camera, failing to meet the viewer's eyes. Interestingly, as Maureen de Jager (2007:51) notes in her paper entitled *The Camera's Lies: Role-Playing, Posing and Imposture in the Self-Portrait Photography of Monique Pelser and Samuel Fosso*, it is only the two "feminised" Fossos (the lady of the bourgeoisie and the liberated American woman) – in other words, the two most radically "othered" Fossos – who look straight back at the camera. But instead of confirming the viewer's position outside of the frame, looking in from a "safe" space of objective detachment, the quiet assertiveness of these gazes involves the viewer in an intricate network of gazes and exchanges. The viewer looks at Fosso looking at the viewer; Fosso looks at the viewer looking at him looking like her. At the same time, Fosso as subject (director of the image) looks at Fosso as object (character in the image) and vice versa (de Jager 2007:51).

Caught up in the dynamics between subject and object, self and "other", Fosso's self-portraits are also caught up in the struggle between *proof* and *pretence*, where the photograph is both a marker of identity and a maker of identity; something that points, indexically, to its subject at the same time as it re-presents that subject as an "other" (de Jager 2007:51).

Complicating the idea of a photograph as representation of 'truth' and 'authenticity' it is interesting to look at the work of Peter Engblom, an artist who engages in the satire of the West's fascination of the exotic. In a similar style to Veleko, Engblom's show *Zulu Sushi* (2003) probes critical insight into the interlacing of cultures. While researching the history of Zululand

and his family's presence there since arriving as German missionaries, artist Peter Engblom discovered documents and paperwork that establish the identity of Mpunzi Shezi, the first Zulu missionary to visit Japan at the turn of the last century. Shezi's mission was "to take ubuntu to the Buddhists and bring Zen to the Zulus". Contrived from Engblom's understanding of Zulu culture, and imbued with an openly and contemptuous take on cultural impurity, *Zulu Sushi* (2003) supposedly reveals, in a flippant manner, a recently discovered archive telling the story of a nineteenth century Zulu, Mpunzi Shezi, as he travels to Japan. In an image titled *Zulu Sushi KA 5044* (2001) [fig. 2.11] a Zulu warrior looks towards what appears to be a Japanese woman in the forefront of the image. The woman is mostly naked; her chest is bound with pink rope that offsets the cherry blossoms in the background. The woman's body is completely exposed except for her face, which is painted in white mask corresponding to the snow capped Fuji mountain in the distance. Engblom's image is deliberately and explicitly derogatory, playing into the Western stereotypes of Asian woman as exotic, mysterious and passive in contrast to the African male who is portrayed as physically powerful, actively gazing at the Japanese woman in an overtly sexual and 'animal like' manner. Engblom's work prods at the way in which Eurocentric perspectives of "Africa" and the "East" are presented in a manner which claims authenticity. Playfully, yet at the same time deliberately offensively, critiquing European practices, which in times past have categorised, 'othered' and appropriated people of Africa and Asia, Engblom constructs an uneasy scene to disturb the viewer.

The setting and the poses of the two individuals in *Zulu Sushi KA 5044* (2001) [fig. 2.11] is such that the viewer assumes a place between the man and woman, in an awkward, uncomfortable space and suggested to observe. The obtrusive, unrelenting gaze of the Zulu in this image seems heightened by the descending, reluctant gaze of the Japanese woman. The bizarre inter-cultural dynamics taking place in the idyllic, picturesque surroundings of Japan here are constructed on

pre-suppositions, reveal a sense of fantasy, not reality or experience and this prompts the viewer to consider the plausibility of the work.

Veleko's serene, composed and self-possessed gesture in *Liberty* (2008) [fig. 2.1] presents a sharp contrast to the Japanese woman in Engblom's work. In *Liberty* (2008) [fig. 2.1], the subdued sense of reclusion evoked in the gesture of Veleko's dropped head is in contrast to the colourfully staged self-representational sense of assuredness of her clothing and dramatic hand gesture. This contrast creates a delicate aesthetic slippage, giving *Liberty* (2008) [fig. 2.1] a performing arts or theatrical quality. Comparing Veleko's work to Fosso's self-portraits both artists use clothes as critical props to deliberately and theatrically challenge a play with assumptions of identity based on appearance and historical background. Perhaps it is the Japanese woman's half-removed clothing and nakedness in *Zulu Sushi KA 5044* (2001) [fig. 2.11], coupled with and what appears to be her bound wrists that creates a loaded sense of vulnerability. Artists Fosso and Veleko engage in a slightly different form of role-playing. Rather than trying on a variety of guises, in *Wonderland* (2008) Veleko tends to pursue people on the streets, fashion, graffiti and personal spaces. It is political layers, diplomacies and dialogues such as these presented within the works of Veleko, Fosso and Engblom which feed off each other and generate what Powell (2008:16) terms a "myriad of perspectives...multiple readings, [which are] layered and complex" and which seem to "enliven the image and lure the viewer".

Considering the different layers and dialogues in the work *Liberty* (2007) [fig. 2.1] the viewer may read a sense of political undertone in the work of Veleko. In his book titled, *Cutting a Figure: Fashioning Black Portraiture*, Richard J. Powell (2008) makes use of the expression "cutting a figure" as a means of metaphorically carving through the diverse subgenres of black portraiture, stressing the power of portraiture to give voice to the voiceless. Powell (2008:212)

argues that what makes “black portraits” exceptional is the way that the subjects “clothe” themselves psychologically to produce a “self” to be portrayed and understood by another. The “clothing” Powell refers to here is indicated by the manner in which “black portraiture” deals with the concern of a historically white and “Western” dominated art world. While Engblom dresses and undresses the individuals in his work to demonstrate the power of subject/ object relations, Veleko and Fosso use clothing to complicate and by extension elevate their personal identities. The thematic current that flows throughout Veleko and Fosso’s portraits in an intentional and subconscious manner, “is freedom: both personal, bodily emancipation and sovereignty in an abstract, metaphysical sense” (Powell 2008:25).

Veleko effectively uses portraiture as a means of acting out emancipation or liberty, a release from a South African history of oppression. Comparing *Liberty* (2007) [fig. 2.1] to a portrait titled *Joseph Cinqué* (1840) by painter Nathaniel Jocelyn [fig. 2.12]; both portraits seem to encapsulate this freedom-centered dynamic³⁰.

Represented with a staff, Cinque seems to invoke the symbol of a Western ancient shepherd or wanderer, not a violent intruder at all. Powell (2008:31) notes “this representation of the Cinque contradicts the prevailing Western perception of Cinque and his fellow Africans as savages and instead embraces an allegorical representation of Christian proselytizing, and a symbol of black

³⁰ Before examining Nathaniel Jocelyn’s Cinque, a concise retelling of the proceedings that surrounded its formation is in order. Jocelyn’s painting is of an individual named Joseph Cinque who, as records confirm “was captured in Sierra Leone by African slave traders in 1839 and imprisoned on the Portuguese slave ship *Tecora*. He was taken to Cuba where he was sold to Spaniards and transported with the intention of being sold to work on the Cuban sugar plantations. Cinqué led a revolt, on the ship, demanding that it be directed back to Sierra Leone. However, the ship vacillated between the coasts of the United States and Africa and after about two months, reached United States waters. Members of the USS *Washington* charged the Africans with mutiny, and took them to New Haven, Connecticut to await trial. In March 1840, the Supreme Court ruled that Cinque and the other Africans who had mutinied, had done so to regain their freedom after being kidnapped and sold illegally. The Court ordered these individuals to be freed and returned to Africa and Cinqué reached his homeland in 1842.” Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 2009. Retrieved August 15, 2009 from www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Cinque.

activism.” In a similar manner to the way in which Jocelyn's *Portrait of Joseph Cinque*, captures the poetic struggle of two cultures working together for freedom and justice, Veleko's *Liberty* (2007) [fig. 2.1] sensitively combines two cultures, “African” and “Eastern” which have openly been subject to Western prejudice and discrimination. *Liberty* (2007) [fig 2.1] seems to actively stand against decades of having been made subservient through colonialism and orientalism. Carefully carving through elements once quintessentially associated with “Africa” and the “East,” Veleko delicately unpicks these facets and interweaves them, complicating a neatly categorised view of history.

Powell's observation of a fusing of two cultures in Jocelyn's *Portrait of Joseph Cinque* is applicable to draw upon in relation to *Liberty* (2007) [fig. 2.1] where Veleko's self-portrayal seems to sum up the vibrant inter-cultural collisions impacting the streets of contemporary South Africa. In a similar manner to the way in which “Nathaniel Jocelyn's portrait of Joseph Cinque – with its dark figure and lighter background – reverses the tonal dynamic of portraits in which Caucasian figures dominate a darker visual landscape” (Powell: 2008: 31), Veleko similarly ruptures conventional Western expectations of African portraiture³¹. Wearing martial arts clothing instead of perhaps traditional Xhosa cloth and beads associated with her place of birth, Veleko disrupts Western expectations of portraiture, creating a refreshing, even jarring composition.

A contemporary viewer may or may not understand why it would seem customary for an 1840 viewer to expect Joseph Cinque to be clothed in traditional dress rather than a white cloak and biblical staff; yet considering the large amount of inter-cultural relations taking place internationally at present it is unusual that a similar reaction was experienced by Veleko when

³¹ Conventional Western ideologies have examined art, especially “African art” from a perspective of “authenticity.” Such ideologies presume that outside influences taint the idea of “pure African art.” This idea is examined more thoroughly in the first chapter.

she exhibited *Liberty* (2007) [fig. 2.1] at the Grahamstown National Arts Festival in 2008. According to Veleko³², many viewers did not know what to make of a Xhosa woman dressed in “Eastern” clothing and asked her reason for this. Caucasian British figures no longer dominate the portraiture genre and yet even today some viewers find it a little out of the ordinary that two cultures can be jointly represented so effectively. Observing Jocelyn’s sensitive use of tonal contrast between the darker foreground and the lighter background in his work, a technique used to subtly disrupt the conventions of nineteenth-century portraiture (Powell 2008:31), the viewer may relate this technique to *Liberty* (2007) [fig. 2.1]. Making use of a mono-tone background in *Liberty* (2007) [fig. 2.1], Veleko subtly undermines conventional modes of representation which historically tends to set a scene to position the subject and control how he/she is perceived by the viewer. By driving out any recognisable clues to a specific backdrop, Veleko denies the viewer the ability to locate and position her in any one particular site³³. In *Liberty* (2007) [fig. 2.1] an energetic figure dressed in black poses against a lighter, more washed-out, ambiguous setting. This tonal technique stands in direct contrast to Veleko’s earlier series *Beauty is in the Eye of the Beholder* (2006) where Veleko’s work is framed by the streets of Johannesburg. *Wonderland* (2008), more specifically the work *Liberty* (2007) [fig. 2.1], serves to decontextualise Veleko as a subject. Instead of being a “Jozi girl”³⁴, *Liberty* (2007) [fig. 2.1] locates Veleko in what Powell (2008:219) terms a “duty-free pictorial zone, liberated from the narrative-enforcing environs and “noise” of a [specific] culture.” In *Liberty* (2007) [fig. 2.1] Veleko could effectively be anywhere or in any culture against this cloudy, monotone backdrop. Uninhibited by the conventions of the

³² Personal correspondence with Veleko, Cape Town 5 August 2009

³³ There is a sense here, that Veleko is leading the viewer out of a fixed idea of place and into a transnational, transmutable milieu.

³⁴ Veleko loves the urban environment of Johannesburg and the ‘Jozi’ people in it. In one of her projects “Beauty is in the Eye of the Beholder”, she captures colourful people in the streets of Johannesburg wearing colourful clothes that don’t match; calling it ‘street fashion’ which she believes represents something of the lives of the people she is photographing. “I look at fashion and how it creates identity, because fashion plays with identity,” she explains. Personal correspondence with Veleko, Cape Town 5 August 2007.

European eye which in times past have 'othered' and appropriated Africa (Hall: 2001), Veleko seeks to reclaim subjectivity by creatively reconfiguring perceptions of the body in relation to geographic space.

v) Dressing up and using props to create “fantasy” spaces.

Often self-portraits appear to bear no resemblance to the artist on initial contact, yet upon deeper reflection they expose the artist's inner qualities. In modern society the viewer is obliged to accept that with regard to contemporary portraiture the actual subject and the features shown in the portrait will not always be physically alike. Borgatti (1990: 76) notes,

The modern period is rich in examples of portraiture that convey a personal identity without resorting to literal physical description. It is the responsibility of the viewer to recognise the subject, and acquire the knowledge that enables him/her to make the connection.

Perhaps an African woman dressed in a kimono articulates the concept of Veleko's contemporary identity more accurately than an African woman in traditional African dress. Exploring this issue, it is interesting to consider the work of Yinka Shonibare. Nigerian born artist, Yinka Shonibare explores issues of race and class through a range of media that includes sculpture, painting, photography, and installation art. Key materials in Shonibare's work since 1994 are the brightly coloured 'African' fabrics (Dutch wax-printed cotton) that he buys himself from Brixton market in London. The fabrics appear to be 'authentically' African but in fact prove to have a crossbred cultural background of their own. Shonibare plays on the fallacy of 'authentic' signification, using these supposedly 'African' looking fabrics to make up his installations. In a work titled, *Gainsborough's Mr and Mrs Andrews Without Their Heads* (1998), Shonibare dresses headless dummies in Victorian style clothing. The material used for this clothing is fabric usually associated with black-African cultures but in Shonibare's work they are cut and sewn into eighteenth-and nineteenth-century European style garments. Shonibare's

installations epitomize the common modern fracture between the appearance and fact of material identity. Perhaps as viewers there is a need to reassess and renovate ideas of self-portraiture. Explorations of identity through the questioning of notions such as culture, race, and gender have, as Powell (2008:201) notes, pushed self-portraiture “into new uncharted territories, where identity [becomes] a feigned objective and normalcy [is] answerable to a nonquantifiable standard.”

This idea of a manufactured identity is hinted at in New York Times, Art critic Holland Cotter’s (2003)³⁵ observation of Lyle Ashton Harris’s photographic work *Hottentot Venus 2000* (1994). Cotter (2003) describes Harris’s work to be “self-portraiture that is not quite self-portraiture, based on fiction that is not quite fiction”. Veleko’s *Wonderland* develops a comparable playful act on the stage of ‘reality’. Veleko has created a safe space for society to contemplate questions or ideas which might not sit comfortably in reality – ideas which are not spontaneously explored for fear of offending cultural opinion or belief.

Classifications such as the “West and the Rest” (Hall:1977) and the “Venus Hottentot”³⁶ are notions which have been constructed to enable the ‘easy’ process of information, but in reality they are harmful. Diversity amongst individuals and within cultures means nations are a lot more inter-related than Western preconceptions have led us to believe. In a tongue-in-cheek manner Veleko is, in fact, questioning whether her stance of linking cultures through style and fashion is so fantastical, simplistic and ‘Wonderlandish’ – or whether it is in fact part of a broader outlook which could be applied and engaged with in reality. *Wonderland* (2008) at first glance is a light, playful place, but by taking a deeper look into the images it is more than just a fun and amusing

³⁵ Holland Cotter, “When the I Is The Subject, And It’s Always Changing,” New York Times, 12 February 2003.

³⁶ Saartjie “Sarah” Baartman (1789 – 29 December 1815) was a Khosa woman who was exhibited in 19th century Europe under the name “Hottentot Venus” – “Hottentot”, the then-current name for the Khosa people, is now considered an offensive term.

space. Through the use of specific dress code, Veleko creates political undertone and then manipulates it by interweaving issues of 'race' and culture. This technique is an effective means of encouraging the viewer to consider the possibility of her playful 'Wonderland' becoming a reality. As Nadia Arnold (2008) writes in her review of *Wonderland* (2008):

Even though this world is a form of fantasy, a place that Veleko has created, the elements of reality such as the South African Apartheid past lurks in the very distance... By using herself Veleko is able to demonstrate these issues of race, beauty and prejudice,.. revealing how easily people judge and place others into categories based on outer exterior³⁷.

Remaining mindful of what is realistic in relation to what Veleko poses as fiction, Veleko places the viewer between these spaces – and it is here where metaphor, irony and allegory in Veleko's work can be singled out. In the *Wonderland* catalogue Tracy Murinik (2008:10) writes,

Wonderland, in this instance, is a world that is worthy of and rich with wonder and intrigue, inscribed playfully as an exercise in fancy and fantasy, but that simultaneously also encompasses a gentle degree of irony and occasional darker contradiction.

Irony and contradiction exist in the odd moment of incongruity, when the viewer is able to pick up from certain representations a hazy, strange sense of unease. The exhibition space, plastered in flowery wall paper and filled with the innocent, dreamy music of a child's windup toy box seems intense when the viewer picks up a hint that he/she is not merely invited to elusively wonder about something dreamy at all – but seems to be facing more serious political

³⁷ An essay on Nontsikelelo Veleko's 'Wonderland' exhibition (2008) by Nadia Arnold (2008). Retrieved October 8, 2009 from [astrochicksphotodiary.blogspot.com](http://astrochicksphotodiary.blogspot.com/2009/07/essay-nontsikelelo-veleko-wonderland.html): <http://astrochicksphotodiary.blogspot.com/2009/07/essay-nontsikelelo-veleko-wonderland.html>

questioning about issues such as transnationalism and interculturalism. This sense may also be felt in Veleko's image *Love For Self* (2007)³⁸ [fig. 2.4].

In *Love For Self* (2007) [fig. 2.4], Veleko, adorned in a black kimono and red sash, is positioned on her back on a luscious green heart-shaped patch of lawn. In a probing and unrelenting manner (with one eye slightly obscured by a few blades grass), Veleko stares at the viewer through a pink and white painted facial mask. On initial reflection there doesn't appear to be anything eerie or distorted about Veleko's open demeanour, yet the image does seem to incite a slight unease. Studying *Love for Self* (2007) [fig. 2.4], there is a vague sense that beneath the long grass there may be something tying Veleko down, and yet at the same time she appears buoyant – afloat on the heart-shaped patch of grass she has created. Lying with her palms turned up and her torso faced towards the heavens, Veleko, by way of her open-minded demeanour, encourages the viewer to consider her light-hearted, “the sky's the limit” attitude. Concurrently however, Veleko's figure is pressed into the long grass emphasising a sense of weightiness, a feeling that her body is resisting a gravitational force that is pulling her down. These signs evoke a sense of upward/downward movement in the work. The instability and tension generated by Veleko here subtly links to political views of movement, as through her “Eastern” dress Veleko seems to encourage movement between national borders, promoting the idea of porous national and cultural frames.

In *Love For Self* (2007) [fig. 2.4] Veleko is lying down, yet she is not positioned in a lounging manner. Her posture does not evoke a relaxed atmosphere while it does not conjure up feelings of stiffness or anxiety. Veleko's upward facing palms suggest, to some degree, a sense of

³⁸ Images *Love For Self* (2007) and *Liberty* (2007) form part of Veleko's *Chinese/Japanese* (2007) series yet these works are also part of Veleko's *Wonderland* (2008) exhibition. *Love For Self* (2007) was not displayed in the *Wonderland* (2008) exhibition at the Grahamstown National Arts Festival (2008) due to space limitations but the image does form part of the *Wonderland* (2008) catalogue.

submission, which is incongruent to her self-assured appearance in *Liberty* (2007) [fig. 2.1] and seems to stir up faint thoughts of obedient compliance, persecution and discrimination – which could be read as discomfoting to the viewer. The idea of persecution and discrimination here, combined with the appearance of Veleko's posture seems to call to mind images of the crucifix. The symbol of the crucifix reminds Christians of the high price paid for humankind's sins, inspiring believers to repent of their sins and be grateful for the salvation obtained by Jesus' death on the cross. Perhaps through the titling of Veleko's images, *Liberty* and *Love for Self* the artist is encouraging viewers to remember the high price paid by those who fought in the Apartheid struggle for liberation and independence.

Examining *Love for Self* (2007) [fig. 2.4], the viewer may draw a link to Rotimi Fani-Kayode's image entitled *Every Moment Counts*. Fani-Kayode's image represents symbols of Christianity, a cherished disciple figure leaning against the body of a Christ-like figure whose eyes stare upwards to the heavens. Writing on Kayode's work, Stuart Hall (2001:40) notes,

In *Every Moment Counts*, the black Christ-figure, wearing a halo of pearls around his dreadlocks and staring into the future, seems transfixed by imitations of mortality. Against the oncoming darkness, he gathers protectively into his priestly or regal cloak the naked youth who cleaves to him for guidance.

Fani-Kayode's image intentionally draws reference to Christianity as he considers the prospect of his future and life after death. I would argue that although Veleko's *Love for Self* (2007) [fig. 2.4] may to some viewers evoke a sense of Christianity, the two pieces deal with vastly different issues. Veleko's *Love for Self* (2007) [fig. 2.4] may allude to Christian persecution through her compliant gesture (arms laid out at either side of her body, with palms facing upwards, forming the symbol of a cross), but I do not propose that it is the artist's primary

objective to imply Christian teaching. Although the Bible verse Psalms 23: 1-6 (“The Lord is my shepherd... He makes me lie down in green pastures... He restores my soul”) may be called to mind, what Veleko seems to be seeking above all in this image is the peace and solitude of the green pastures of her garden, and through the subtleties of her gesture, perhaps a sense of spiritual tranquillity. Veleko seems to integrate a mixture of different spiritual suggestions in *Love for Self* (2007) [fig. 2.4] seemingly similar to the way in which she merges cultural references. Powell (2008:221) notes,

Whether a biblical referent, slavery and its legacies of bondage and branding or a chronicling of the “spectacle of blackness”, postmodern portraiture’s attraction to history is distinctive, and the diasporic permutations of this remembering (and disremembering) forms its own definitive, critical subset.

As seen in *Liberty* (2007) [fig. 2.1], Veleko’s work is layered in symbolic and metaphorical elements which are hinted at through gesture, clothing and image-titling, and *Love for Self* (2007) [fig. 2.4] is no different. Laying bare a variety of different indexes Veleko subtly pushes the reading of her work toward a fluid and unrestricted sphere of interpretation. The term “spirituality” integrates a wide range of religious practices and is therefore an appropriate term to use when considering the religious iconography of Veleko’s work. Spirituality is born out of a need to find balance between the material and the righteous demands of modern living. The viewer cannot know for sure what Veleko meditatively reflects upon lying in the serene outdoor environment of her home, but by the title of the piece there is a sense that Veleko is reaching for a state of inner balance – a love for herself. The heart-shaped patch of lawn Veleko rests on is self-manicured which is an important aspect to consider in today’s society where cosmetic grooming is commonly taken to superficial and impractical lengths through surgery and unnatural procedures in an effort to obtain a sense of *love for self*. Juxtaposing her body against a freshly cut backdrop of immaculate lawn, shaped in the symbol of a heart, Veleko hints at the

fact that by trying to find inner resolve often individuals sacrifice and hurt themselves unnaturally in pursuit of “perfection”. *Love for Self* (2007) [fig. 2.4] presents the viewer with conflict, when is *love for self* positive and when is it selfish – when is it good and when is it harmful?

This image may remind the viewer of another image in Veleko’s *Wonderland* exhibit – the work titled, *I am what I am, I’m all that you need* (2002). These words are revisited in Veleko’s *Love For Self* (2007) [fig. 2.4] image through her open palms. Veleko’s open palms emanate a subtle sacrificial quality, a sense that she is offering herself up – which further pushes the work into a spiritual realm. Kendon (2004: 280) discusses the invitational qualities of such a gesture, noting that it is “commonly used as a way of suggesting that the speaker is leaving the situation referred to open for any relevant action by others”. Through the power of gesture in Veleko’s work there is a sense that non-verbal communication can be more powerful than the spoken word – and that through imagery the viewer is given the opportunity to gain an intensely personal, cathartic reading from the work. Veleko’s work seems to connect a lot with the soul and the ideas of inner qualities manifesting in external expression. There is a sense that in Veleko’s absorptive moment of stillness, she is allowing the internal current of her soul flow towards transcendence. Elizabeth Lesser, spiritualist and author of the 2004 book *Broken Open: How difficult times can help us grow* is an influential writer on issues of self and societal healing. Lesser states,

When change comes we have the choice to either use it to find the eternal self that survives any change and not only survives the change but comes out stronger, better, more who we are. Or we could get burned by it a little bit and run away from what change is really asking us to do. What is life trying to teach me here?³⁹

³⁹ Interview by Wendy Schuman, managing editor of Beliefnet. Retrieved April 9, 2009 from [www.beliefnet.com: http://www.beliefnet.com/Holistic-Living/2004/08/Being-Broken-Open.aspx?p=3](http://www.beliefnet.com/Holistic-Living/2004/08/Being-Broken-Open.aspx?p=3)

Operating in a Post-Apartheid, contemporary, transnational milieu, Veleko's images require the viewer to examine the way in which we define ourselves as individuals and as communities.

What is our position or function in a nation which has radically progressed from the damages of apartheid and is still dynamically transforming? Do we play an active role in breaking down and changing the preconceived ideas of what it means to live in "South Africa?" Veleko's self-portraits exist on a transformed level – an altered, enhanced state of mind, and as Mosaka (2008: 65) observes "choosing to subscribe to multiple definitions of cultural identity that both blur the boundaries between, and undermine the hierarchies that enforce racial and economic difference". Veleko has transcended the limitations of Apartheid, the dogmas of xenophobia – "the vertical lines of force" (Hall: 2003: 34) – and is forging "new lateral connections" (Hall: 2003: 34) – encouraging transnational modes of thought that obliterate lines drawn along political and ethnic values. As Stuart Hall (2003:34) notes,

Borders, which [once rigidly] divided, [have] become sites of surreptitious crossing. Separate and inviolable worlds meet and collide. Where only the pure, orthodox, were valorised, a new universe of vernaculars and creole forms comes into existence. Multiple logics of identification and translation operate.

Using gesture, pose, colourful clothing and props, Veleko subtly reflects on the stereotypes inherent in South African history while simultaneously gives rise to an awareness of the multiple dimensions and expressions of "African" realities. Veleko breaks down stereotypes of what it means to live in "Africa" today by effectively injecting and infusing transnational/transcultural elements in her work. It is these elements which create plurality of vision– providing great scope for the renewal and reformation of individualities. As Murinik (2008: 12) writes,

No longer is South Africa its own contained parochial complexity of fraught local cultural and identity politics. It is now all that it was and all that it has absorbed into its midst: it is its past and its present; itself, its visitors and its neighbours. It is at long last a global entity, a place of

possibility, energy and adventure, if not always a comfortable balance of these things.

Veleko constructs her identity within the framework of possibility and opportunity.

Emphasising concepts of movement, prospect, fantasy and vision in her work, Veleko absorbs transnational and transcultural possibilities into her midst and presents a space for future dialogues of transcultural and transnational discourse. In the next section I introduce Tracy Payne, a painter who currently resides in Cape Town, South Africa and whose work also has transnational associations. Payne's paintings engage in associations with the "East" and similar to Veleko, Payne enjoys incorporating a variety of Eastern elements into her South African reality⁴⁰.

II) TRACY PAYNE

In this section I draw on Tracy Payne's *Sacred Yang* (2007) series to further examine how artists operating in "Africa" are extending the dimensions of "African" art by incorporating transnational visions in their portrait expressions of individualities.

Tracy Payne was born in Cape Town in 1965. She graduated from the University of Cape Town in 1987 with a Bachelor of Arts in Fine Art majoring in painting. In 2000 her documentary *Hush: A portrait of Tracy Payne* (2000), formed part of the official programme of the International Festival of Woman's Film in Creteil, France. In 2002 Payne was involved in another documentary directed by Tacako Mori for Nippon TV which focused on her search for *Sakura* (the cherry blossom). This documentary traces her journey to the Matsumoto Mountains,

⁴⁰ In two separate interviews, artists Veleko (personal correspondence, 5 August 2007) and Payne (personal interview, Cape Town 13 March 2009) told me of their interest in incorporating "Eastern" philosophies and practices into their lifestyles in South Africa. Payne regularly participates in Yoga classes while both artists have read extensively on literature surrounding Chinese and Japanese philosophies, which they incorporate into their personal philosophies of life.

the foothills of the Japanese Alps and prompted her later two-part series of work titled *Sacred Yin* (2005) and *Sacred Yang* (2007). In 2006 Payne participated in the travelling exhibition *New Painting* (KZNSA Gallery, Durban; Unisa Art Gallery, Pretoria; Johannesburg Art Gallery) as well as the exhibition *Second to None* at the Iziko South African National Gallery. Payne currently works from her studio in Observatory, Cape Town.

i) Spirituality: Protecting and Re-balancing the Sacred Self.

Payne's early work conveys the domination of yang over yin, and successive bodies of work have been concerned with bringing these energies into balance. Following her previous exhibition, *Sacred Yin* (2005), Payne's mind is turned to the notion of sacred yang after encountering the actions of China's Shaolin monks⁴¹. Tracy Payne's *Sacred Yang* (2007) exhibition seems to connect a lot with the soul and the ideas of spirituality. Payne describes her masculine side to be "quite well developed;"⁴² she believes she has a lot of masculine energy. Payne uses the spiritual *yin* and *yang* energies present in Chinese culture to subtly question, and undermine society's construction of binaries. In his book *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: society and gender in China*, Kam Louie (2002:9) writes,

In discussions of Asian sexuality, the most commonly invoked 'Chinese' paradigm is the *yin-yang* harmony of opposites. Within the common, superficial appreciation of the *yin-yang* theory, femininity and masculinity are placed in a dichotomous relationship whereby *yin* is

⁴¹ Payne's visit to Japan sparked her interest in Japanese culture. Tracing the routes of Japanese culture to China, Payne learned of the Shaolin Monks and this initiated her *Sacred Yang* (2007) series. (Personal interview with Tracy Payne, Cape Town 13 March 2009) Payne (2007) recalls, "I was transfixed. These are spiritual men, Zen Buddhists, and at the same time masters in the martial art of kung fu - a seeming paradox. They are so strong yet their bodies looked soft and their faces serene. They seem to embody the masculine principle, sacred yang, a perfect marriage of spiritual and physical. They are essentially men of peace, for to initiate an attack is an aggressive act and an aggressive act is contrary not just to the spirit of kung fu, but also to life itself. They set out not to conquer others but rather to use their physical strength in self-defense to protect that which is sacred. It was as if I'd found through these monks a new beginning with 'man', a place of forgiveness and sacred appreciation." Retrieved October 10, 2009 from www.michaelstevenson.com: http://www.michaelstevenson.com/contemporary/exhibitions/payne/sacred_yang.htm

⁴² Personal interview with Tracy Payne, Cape Town 13 March 2009

female and *yang* is male...Real men are supposed to have plenty of *yang* essence (qi), defined vaguely as determination, strength and good self-control... [However,] every man and woman embodies both *yin* and *yang* essences... both essences are regarded as being in constant interaction where *yin* merges with *yang* and *yang* with *yin* in an endless dynamism.

Louie (2002:10) emphasises that men and women embrace both *yin* and *yang* energies at any particular point in time, and this paradigm has proven to be so wide reaching that it effectively maps the universe on a sexual male-female grid. Every unit is believed to encompass both *yin* and *yang* aspects, which constantly interact, neither form of energy existing in absolute stasis. *Yang* energy is generally associated with bright, positive, masculine principles; while *yin* is linked to that which is dark, passive and weak⁴³.

It is interesting to note that in this series Payne does not choose to communicate her sense of self by way of exploring her roots or representing the environment she dwells in; she uses instead imagery with an “Eastern” sensibility to reflect and mirror her sense of self. Louie (2002:10) notes, “in a cross-cultural analysis, one could propose that Chinese masculinity is ultimately more all-encompassing than Western masculinity due to this acceptance of the merger of *yin* and *yang* essences in one corporeal form”. Payne describes the subjects portrayed in *Sacred Yang* (2007) as “familiar” to her; she believes these monks reflect her inner-most being, stating “in these subjects I found my mirror, the mirror I want to be reflected in”⁴⁴.

⁴³ Of course these terms are problematic as they have a tendency to over-simplify, generalizing aspects of male into one category and aspects of female into another. Such over-simplification can be noticed in Western dichotomies which associate the male with culture and intellect and the female with nature and emotion – being submissive to her male counterpart. Western judgment has also been noted to split extensive regions on a geographical map into ‘North,’ ‘South,’ ‘East,’ and ‘West,’ and further still splitting ‘East’ into ‘Far East’ and ‘Middle East.’ Divides such as these create confusion and a shadowy sense of jumble, implying a sort of mishmash or hodgepodge of nations which operate in the ‘mysterious realm’ of ‘the East.’

⁴⁴ Personal interview with Tracy Payne, Cape Town 13 March 2009

ii) Journeying through the Self

Of particular interest, is the way in which Payne uses a range of techniques to give her work an indeterminable, variable quality. In *Starburst Monk* (2007) [fig. 2.14] Payne portrays the romanticized, physically powerful body of a martial artist monk against a colour-washed backdrop. The central position of the monk leads the viewer to believe that he is a subject of great importance, yet his silhouette is so skillfully washed into the backdrop, there is a sense that the monk's journey is perhaps more important than the monk himself. The washed backdrop gives the viewer a sense that the monk is in transit and in order to discover the reasons for and importance of his journey the viewer needs to also be open to movement. This sense of movement seems to subtly suggest that in order to gain significant meaning from the work the viewer needs to be open to changing or altering his/her outlook. This sense of movement is also used in Anime, Japanese animation and comic strips, which are generally fictional and require the reader or viewer to alter his/her outlook in order to fully engage with the narrative. The sense of "flatness" as well as the shiny quality of in Payne's *Sacred Yang* (2007) images seems to evoke Anime as well as Chinese silk-screen painting. The horizontal brushstrokes and wash of colour in the backdrop allude to Chinese silk-screen printing, directing the viewing eye horizontally across the image, there is a subtle sense that the viewer is journeying through the work and that the glowing skin of the monk is only intended to arrest the viewer's attention for a short time. Perhaps the significance of the monk is to initiate the viewer's own journey. Payne's paintings seem to hold a spiritual quality and in comparison to Veleko's *Love for Self* (2007) [fig. 2.4] and *Liberty* (2007) [fig. 2.1] pieces, it is interesting to note that although both series speak of self-absorption, Veleko's photographs, due to the nature of the photographic medium, seem to exude a sense of narcissism, a stronger sense of *love for self*.

The horizontal inclination in *Starburst Monk* (2007) [fig. 2.14] can be linked to Veleko's *Love for Self* (2007) [fig. 2.4] image in which a horizontally reclined Veleko is wistfully, and with no sense of urgency, is caught up in what appears to be an endless daydream of self-contemplation. The landscape format of *Love for Self* (2007) [fig. 2.4] seems to heighten this dreamy scene of on-going introspection, leading a viewer to believe that this *Love for Self* (2007) [fig. 2.4] consideration could go on indefinitely. Examining the aspect of movement in portraits, Teresa de Lauretis (1990) discusses the issue of shifting between spaces, both metaphorically and physically. Lauretis (1990:138) notes that contemporary subjectivities are more frequently choosing "a place of discourse... which is at best tentative, uncertain and unguaranteed" in favour of "a place that is safe, that is 'home'." While Veleko allows her psyche to be transferred to a *wonderland*, Payne's subjects seem to be physically ungrounded. The lack of solidity in the monks' environment seems to evoke a transitory space, a space of abstraction and ambiguity.

In images such as *Awakening II* (2006) [fig. 2.15], which I will later discuss in more detail, Payne seems to capture a sense of the "tentative, uncertain and unguaranteed" that de Lauretis (1990) speaks of. David Gutterman (2001:70) perceives the risk of moving away from the familiar to open possibility and opportunity, arguing that it has "the power to remodel, restructure and improve if the possibility and mutability of identity are acknowledged". By creating a sense of self that is "mobile" and "persevering" Veleko and Payne seem to reflect Gutterman's (2001:70) outlook that qualities of mutability better enable an individual "to honour and profit from the differences they [are] sure to encounter [in themselves and in contact and partnership with others]".

ii) Traversing the Framework of Perception

Postmodernism in geography emphasizes fluidity, contingency, movement, and multiplicity, questioning the rigid spatial frameworks [which] limit and constrain our intellectual insight (Lewis and Wigen: 1997: 15).

Through her transient painting style, Payne subtly challenges the supposed importance and inflexibility of labels found in mainstream media and popular culture. Emphasising a sense of ambivalence towards rigid masculine/feminine and East/West dichotomies, Payne subtly breaks down the conservative, inactive regional systems that constrain our imagination. David Gutterman (2001:70) insightfully notes that “the appreciation of difference enables a coalition... [which has the potential to] destabilise and denaturalise the scripts in place, creating a space for a variety of different [*scripts to be*] to be performed”. One such script Gutterman (2001:70) undermines is the idea of masculinity, a Western term which has come to refer to a particular set of norms and qualities relating to men. In her book *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* Elizabeth Grosz (1994) notes that the body not just built out of biology and sensation but also out of psychical investments. Grosz (1994) notes that the body is the material of social and cultural organization, it is “incomplete” and thus subject to endless rewriting and social inscription. Due to the fact that the body is constantly subject to conflict and organisation, Gutterman discharges the singularised term of ‘masculinity,’ and instead proposes the expression *masculinities*. Gutterman (2001:70) argues that “if individuals embrace ambiguity of various masculinities, they can perform fluidity – and work in coalitions with others – in a contingent world”.

This contingent, momentary sense of life is echoed in the image *Starburst Monk* (2007) [fig. 2.14]. The centrally positioned monk, coupled with the precise arrangement of the wreath around his temple evokes a sense of balance – a balance of nature’s circular seasons as well as a

balanced rationality. The luminous crown of cherry blossoms encircling the head of the *Starburst Monk* (2007) [fig. 2.14] seems to hint at the ephemeral nature of life, as cherry blossoms have a particularly short blooming time. Payne sensitively draws attention to the polished cherry blooms and flushed radiance of the monk by offsetting the subject against a wash of shadowy pink color which evokes the colours of the sunset and sunrise.

According to Kate Smith⁴⁵ (2009), a recognized authority on colour meaning, symbolism and psychology, the annual spring blooming of the pink-blossomed cherry trees (the Sakura) is said to represent the young Japanese warriors who fell in battle in their prime of life (the Samurai). Pink in Japanese culture is therefore commonly associated with masculine qualities. Smith (2009) notes that contrary to the Japanese, the Chinese however did not recognise the colour pink until they had contact with Western culture. The Chinese word for pink appropriately translates as “foreign colour”⁴⁶. These facts are interesting to note as the colour pink in Western culture is often associated with girls and femininity. Although pink is linked to masculinity in some cultures and femininity in others, the colour does seem to commonly be tied to representations of gender. Payne’s strong use of this colour seems in a nuanced way to shed light on the ambiguity and indistinct nature of gender. Pink for Payne seems to signify both masculine and feminine qualities. Observing the political associations of the colour pink Smith (2009) notes that a pink triangle is commonly used to represent gays, lesbians, and bisexuals – individuals who do not fit into a conventional, dichotomous arrangement of gender. “The origin of the pink triangle goes back to when Nazis labeled their prisoners in concentration camps. Men who had been jailed

⁴⁵ Smith, K. 2009 Sensational Colour. Retrieved October 10, 2009 from [www.sensational colour.com: http://www.sensationalcolor.com/color-messages-meanings/color-meaning-symbolism-psychology/all-about-the-color-pink.html](http://www.sensationalcolor.com/color-messages-meanings/color-meaning-symbolism-psychology/all-about-the-color-pink.html)

⁴⁶ The fact that the colour pink was recognised in Japan but not in China until China made contact with Western culture is interesting to bear in mind, as Japanese and Chinese cultures are often uncritically lumped together as similar entities, with similar national views and cultural beliefs.

because of supposed homosexuality had to wear the pink triangle on their clothing. In more recent times, this symbol is a sign of pride” (Smith 2009).

In *Starburst Monk* (2007) [fig. 2.14] Payne subtly offsets codes of physical strength and exertion against ones of emotional fragility to undermine societal constructions of masculinity and femininity. The *Starburst* monk does not appear to be in a frail or delicate state – his steady gaze and resolute posture would reveal quite the opposite it would seem, yet his tears do indicate some degree of “splitting open”. Tears seem to be associated with womanly principles; an indication of soft emotion, yet in this image the merging of the monk’s physical strength with his tears subtly creates the opinion that emotional expression may in fact be sign of courage and strength of character. The leaking tears hint at the endurance and determination of the monk – and here, the viewer may recall the English expression “blood, sweat and tears” used to refer to physical effort and sacrifice. This idea of a struggle to resist paradigms that are considered to be acceptable in mainstream guiding principles is a common thread that links the work of Veleko and Payne. Payne’s *Sacred Yang* (2007) images seem to allude to sexuality and a sense of blurring of masculinity and femininity and considering this it may be interesting to consider some of the views of sexuality in South Africa. Mainstream systems of thought regarding sexuality prove difficult to change, for example, in South Africa the constitution and the Labour Relations Act officially recognizes the plight of homosexuals in their struggle for equality. Yet in practice the situation is somewhat different. South African homosexuals continue to face challenges in the workplace, as Mazibuko Jara (1998) notes in an *AfricaFiles* article titled ‘Gay and lesbian rights: Forcing change in South Africa,’ these challenges extend to employment benefits:

If homosexual employees want to register their partner in an employer-sponsored medical aid plan, they should be able to do so. Yet in practice, even with non-discriminatory acts in place, many employers still refuse

to register partners of lesbian and gay employees on their employment benefits... One rarely finds company policies which explicitly state that gay and lesbian employees are discriminated against, yet the restrictive definitions society has given to concepts such as marriage, relationship and family form the basis for the exclusion⁴⁷.

The monks in Payne's work, through a state of deep introspection fight to remove the rod which tidily separates masculine from feminine in society. Veleko's introspective self-portraits also face the impurities in society, in an attempt to move beyond them and reach a state of deliverance and liberation.

iii) Rest. Less. Movement

The sense of movement is an element that underpins and links the work of Veleko and Payne and seems to intermingle both artists struggle for freedom and modification of mainstream notions. The *Starburst Monk's* horizontally sweeping eyebrows and falling tears serve to trace this constant theme of movement subtly suggested throughout Payne's work. Payne seems to use the monk's stamina in *Starburst Monk* (2007) [fig. 2.14] to suggest that change does not spontaneously bring harmony. Rather, the monk, in the midst of outward change and "boundary-dissolving transgressions" (Lewis and Wigen 1997: xi) is at pains to reprogram and resync his inner self, implying that harmony comes about through the toils of personal endeavour. It is not enough to break down and transcend boundaries physically – if transformation is to have a significant and meaningful effect it should begin with a transformation of the self.

⁴⁷ Jara (1998) notes that "there are several employment discrimination cases against ESCOM (the publicly owned South African electricity corporation), the South African Policy Services, and Standard Bank South Africa. *AfricaFiles*. Southern African Report Archive. 'Gay and Lesbian Rights: Forcing Change in South Africa'. Vol 13. No 3, pp.31. Retrieved October 10, 2009 from [www.africafiles.org](http://www.africafiles.org/article.asp?ID=3804): <http://www.africafiles.org/article.asp?ID=3804>

Veleko and Payne are two artists currently operating in South Africa who, as Hall (2003:32) notes in the catalogue *Fault Lines: Contemporary African Art and Shifting Landscapes*, are “disturbing the sight lines on Africa from within and without”. By drawing on Eastern subject matter in their expressions of the self, both artists seem to give “greater continental [scope] in the field of vision to Africa’s northern, Islamic and Arab zones, [creating] a particularly diasporic inflexion to Africa’s unfinished self-definition”. (Hall 2003:32) Continuing, Hall (2003:32) writes, “There is no one ‘Africa’ here to be positively affirmed”. Payne and Veleko in their boundary-transgressing self-representations seems to disrupt “the idea of ‘an essential African aesthetic’ – the idea of a totality of works ‘immersed in a sort of mythological retrospection which seems to issue from the collective unconscious” (Hall 2003:32); instead Payne and Veleko chose to quite literally mutate this idea out of existence.

Another underlying thread interlaced through the work of Veleko and Payne is that of balance. Payne’s work has, as Hall (2003:32) writes, “its own way of negotiating the tension between tradition and modernity, so critical to Africa’s troubled, ongoing dialogue with its ‘Others’”. Veleko and Payne are engaged in what Hall (2003:32) terms “a process of remapping”. (Hall 2003:32) Payne’s monks seem to be shifting their personal attitude and outlook; balancing it with the changing environment. This sense of balance that Payne subtly evokes through her work is not the “Western” type of balance that calls to mind imagery of scales, thoughts of stability, steadiness, fixity and weighted control rather, the *Starburst Monk* (2007) [fig. 2.14] reflects an unsettled state of balance, a journey in which balance is constantly managed and restructured – a sense of balance which is not considered to be an achievable end, but an ambiguous, variable manner of traveling – combining different aspects and events as well as diverse political affairs.

v) Breaking Binary: Mending Ambiguity

Payne's work seems to present subtle commentary on the movement between geographic borders as well as ambiguities of left and right and "east" and "west." Closely examining the works *Beautiful Monk* (2006) [fig. 2.16], *Awakening II* (2006) [fig. 2.15] and *Emerald Monk* (2007) [fig. 2.17] it is interesting to note that in each of these images the subject's gaze is drawn to (the subject's left-hand side but) the viewers' right-hand, or for the purpose of "East" and "West," the viewers "eastern" side. In images *Beautiful Monk* (2006) [fig. 2.16] and *Emerald Monk* (2007) [fig. 2.17] the bodies of the subjects are slightly rotated to face the viewers' right-hand side. In the *Encyclopedia of Creativity Volume 1* Runco and Pritzker (1999: 506) note that,

Researchers have identified the right hemisphere of the brain as the side best suited to process novel information; the left side is better at organizing and retrieving information that has already been learned. One could say that creativity is more a right-brain function than a left one...Science is traditionally associated with the left hemisphere and the masculine, and art is traditionally associated with the right hemisphere and the feminine.

Perhaps Payne's monks face the viewer's right-hand side to subtly represent a turning away from logic, rationality, and linear thinking, associated with the left-hand side of the brain. Payne's monks seem to subtly embrace intuition, creativity, and a figurative understanding, in favour of analysis and classification by glancing towards the viewer's right. In her book *Volatile Bodies: Toward a corporeal feminism* Elizabeth Grosz (1994:65) refers to the work of neurologist Hughlings Jackson (1835-1911) who claimed that the right hemisphere of the brain was crucial in the functioning of speech, intuitive perception and comprehension. Hughlings Jackson believed that this "faculty" of language could not be localised anywhere in the left hemisphere.

Obviously, there are no inherent good or bad qualities to the left or right brain – both are important to function as whole and as complete humans, each of us, regardless of gender, hold the

abilities of both sides. The problem, however, is that the left brain function has been privileged in Western culture, and so has masculinity. Left brain dominance seems to favour one-dimensional thinking and examination, and has been seen as a “superior” way of framing reality, as opposed to the intuitive, emotional, non-linear frame offered by the right brain. Many psychologists today prefer not to sustain the idea of a strong sense of division between left hemisphere and right hemispheres of the brain, believing instead that language for example should be associated with different components of the entire brain and not seen as components of a right or left hemisphere. No one is totally left-brained or totally right-brained and today there seems to be a move toward promoting the brain holistically, as a whole entity which should be developed in entirety and not according to a right brain left brain split.

There is a strong sense that the monks in Payne’s images *Beautiful Monk* (2006) [fig. 2.16], *Emerald Monk* (2007) [fig. 2.17] and *Awakening II* (2006) [fig. 2.15] are positioned to appear to be looking towards the “East”. This is an interesting point to consider, especially in view of the fact that a large proportion of the subjects in *Sacred Yang* (2007) indicate direction through their subtle “Eastward facing” deportment. Rather than merely glancing “Eastwards” *Emerald Monk* (2007) [fig. 2.17], for example, seems to be physically turned to face the “East”⁴⁸. Perhaps Payne’s subjects look towards the “East” with a mindset of starting anew, encouraging renewed

⁴⁸ In *African folklore: an encyclopedia*, Peek and Yankah (2004:44) examine the relationship between rebirth and the cardinal direction of “East” in burial rites: “Some 20,000 years ago, ancestors of the San residing in what is now Botswana and the Kalahari Desert of Southern Africa buried their dead facing east with knees tied close to the chest (fetal position). From around 1700 BCE, Nubian cultures in what is now Sudan buried their dead in round graves, set in a foetal position with the head facing east. Further south, near the site of Ancient Kerma (2400-2050 BCE), bodies were laid in narrow circular graves, covered with leather sheets, and contracted into the foetal position – again with the head facing east... In many of the upper and lower Nile river cultures, the east represented the place from which emerged newly forged creation. The passage from death to life was a process of remoulding or reformation... The rising of the sun in the east is one of the ultimate acts of creation. Death and loss in the social body is balanced by an anticipated generation of novel forms.”

and reformed considerations of what is commonly termed “the East”. Lewis and Wigen (1997:48) question “since the world is round, what can this term ‘the East’ mean?” East has been used as a synonym for ‘Orient’, indicating the vast and foreign realm outside the threshold of Europe which is home to submissive, mysterious and strangely different individuals (1997:55). Lewis and Wigen (1997:60) note that “after the Second World War the ‘East’ became synonymous with communism, the ‘West’ with capitalist democracy,” this longitudinal global partition has also been framed around “a distinction between a spiritualistic East and a materialistic West” (Lewis and Wigen 1997:70). The East is therefore a homogenous term that has been noted to represent all that which the West is not, in essence, “the rest,” as Lewis and Wigen (1997:73) note:

The key components of the Western cluster compromise a familiar list. European civilization is said to be characterized by a compulsion to control and manipulate nature; a tendency to regard the self as autonomous agent in competition with others; a restless desire for growth and development; a keen appreciation for personal freedom; a hunger for material wealth; a practical, this-worldly orientation that seeks social betterment through technological means; and perhaps above all, a commitment to rational enquiry. The Eastern mind has been defined in opposite terms. Put simply, the East is seen as manifest in the communitarian, aesthetic, and other worldly values, extolling the submission of the individual to a timeless, mystical whole.

The trend of constructing binary divisions has largely passed in academia, and few contemporary academics attempt to advocate the essential differences of the two supposed regions. Having said this however, there is still an underlying sense that parts of the stereotypical and homogenous view, linking the “East” with spirituality and stagnation (Lewis and Wigen 1997:6) still continue. In acknowledgement of this, the monks in Payne’s *Sacred Yang* (2007) images, namely *Beautiful Monk* (2006) [fig. 2.16], *Emerald Monk* (2007) [fig. 2.17] and *Awakening II* (2006) [fig. 2.15],

may appear to the viewer to infer political undertone through their 'Eastward facing' deportments.

Reflecting on the precise positioning of Payne's subjects, and the tendency for most of them to be positioned either towards the "East" (with select works facing "West" or straight on) it is significant to bear in mind in real life the monks who appear to be staring fixedly to the "East" would, in reality, have been looking to their left or towards the "West." It is the viewer, then who perceives each of these represented monks to be looking to the "East." By creating a discrepancy between the experience of the viewer and the experience of the monk, Payne subtly draws attention to the ambiguity of the East/West binary. Terms such as "North," "South," "East" and "West" operate well as general points on a compass, but in a broader scheme are subjective and fail to acknowledge the ambiguities of reality. Commenting on the unclear nature of an East/West distinction, Lewis and Wigen (1997: 48) ask,

Were the terms East and West ever meant to be defined mappable categories? Vagueness is of their essence; both are simply convenient rhetorical labels without any rigorous geographical underpinning.

Lewis and Wigen's (1997) concept rests on the idea that mapping the world as a whole is always subjective and never objective. Considering the spatial composition through which people order their knowledge of the world, Lewis and Wigen (1997: 57) argue that geographies are more than just the ways in which societies extend across the earth's surface. These structures are represented by the contested, arbitrary, power-laden, and often inconsistent manner in which they are evaluated from the "outside". This hazy form of definition is alluded to through Payne's indistinct, transient painting style as well as the unfocused, indefinite gaze of the subjects in *Beautiful Monk* (2006) [fig. 2.16], *Emerald Monk* (2007) [fig. 2.17] and *Awakening II* (2006) [fig. 2.15]. Lewis and Wigen (1997: 58) note that "East is a broader term than either *Asia* or *Orient*, yet one that retains the notion of critical distance from the culture of far western Europe".

Payne's images challenge the idea that "the farther east one looks from the West, the less significant geographical divisions become, and the more readily disparate areas seem to be conveniently lumped together (Lewis and Wigen 1997:67).

Terms such as "north," "south," "east" and "west" are linked so explicitly and intricately across the globe by latitudinal and longitudinal lines and yet there is still this idea of a simple binary divide between "east" and "west," "north" and "south". The monks' blank, glassy stares in *Beautiful Monk* (2006) [fig. 2.16] and *Emerald Monk* (2007) [fig. 2.17] seem to portray a hazy sense of remoteness, giving the impression that perhaps the farther each of them looks into the distance the more amalgamated and merged the horizon becomes, leaving a sense of detachment in their eyes. Contrary to the self-aware and mindful gaze of the monk portrayed in *Starburst Monk* (2007) [fig. 2.14], the monks in *Beautiful Monk* (2006) [fig. 2.16] and *Emerald Monk* (2007) [fig. 2.17] may appear to the viewer to be looking outwards and feeling a sense of emptiness. The monk portrayed in *Awakening II* (2006) [fig. 2.15] also looks into the distance with what seems to be a look of doubt or suspicion; his eyes seem to give away an inkling of unease and apprehension.

Searching for a deeper understanding of the work *Awakening II* (2006) [fig. 2.15], the viewer may be inclined to refer to the Payne's *Awakening I* (2006) [fig. 2.18], which appears to be the same monk in an identical position with his eyes closed, as if in an act of contemplation. Of particular interest in *Awakening I* (2006) [fig. 2.18] is the faint representation of an eroticised body in the top right-hand corner of the image. This faded, floating body washes slightly over the contour of the central monk's head, giving the impression that this discreet, understated body could be a portrayal of the central monk's thoughts. The monk in Payne's *Awakening I* (2006) [fig. 2.18] seems to be reflecting on the airy idea of the "East," created by a "European identity which considered itself "superior" in comparison with all non-European peoples and cultures" (Said 2003: 7). The monk in Payne's *Awakening I* (2006) [fig. 2.18] is involved in an

imaginative engagement of things Oriental, conjuring up exotic, spiritual characteristics that may seem “Eastern” from “Western” perspective. As Said (2003:8) stresses “Western logic [which defined an Eastern body] was not governed by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments and projections”. Payne’s representation of the bowed, bare, wrist-bound figure in the top right hand corner of the image in *Awakening I* (2006) [fig. 2.18] subtly gives visual standing to Said’s (2003:6) observation that “Orientalism is not an airy European fantasy about the Orient, but a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment”.

Considering Payne’s *Awakening II* (2006) [fig. 2.15], the look of seriousness and misgiving in the monk’s eyes gives the work a sense of heaviness, subtly weighing it down in relation to the other more transient works in the *Sacred Yang* (2007) series such as *Beautiful Monk* (2006) [fig. 2.16]. The sense of heaviness conveyed in the monk’s eyes here subtly gives weight to Payne’s aesthetic, flowing painting style and this distinct contrast may push the viewer to question whether Payne is undermining the binaries of “East” and “West” or whether she conveniently playing into the aesthetics of them. Lewis and Wigen (1997: 2) note,

The cultural distinction between Europe and Asia has long guided our historical imagination. Each continent is accorded its own history, and we locate its essential nature in opposition to that of other continents.

As Lewis and Wigen (1997: 2) argue, there has been a tendency to let continental constructions organise our insights of the human community. There are entrenched notions in the West that link vast “Eastern” regions to mysterious, threatening spiritual practices. The biggest misconception of “Eastern” religion, seems to result from the constant stereotyping and knocking

the Western media gives religions such as Islam after events such as September 11th 2001, when a series of coordinated suicide attacks by Al-Qaeda were initiated in the United States⁴⁹.

According to The Institute of Islamic Information and Education in Chicago, USA (2009), “Eastern” spirituality is often considered “exotic or even extreme in the modern world”. Perhaps this is because religion doesn't direct daily life in the West, whereas Islam for instance is considered to be a “way of life”. The Institute of Islamic Information and Education (2009) notes that “Muslims make no division between secular and sacred in their lives... but similar to Christianity, Islam permits fighting in self-defence, in defence of religion, or on the part of those who have been expelled forcibly from their homes”. Often dictators and politicians in “Muslim” or “Eastern” countries will use the Name of Islam for their own purposes and this is how the stereotype of mysterious, fundamentalist “Eastern” spirituality is often created. “Islam, however, literally means ‘submission to God’ and is derived from a root word meaning ‘peace’” (Institute of Islamic Information and Education 2009)

Stereotypes of the “East” often seem to comprehensively align cultural practices with certain types of people. Although, for example there are Muslims in China, there is a tendency to associate China with Buddhism or Daoism, Japanese with Shinto as well as Buddhism, India with Hinduism and Islam and dominantly Arabic countries with extremist Islam.

Transnationalism misaligns such parallels and allows for fluidity between nations and cultural practices so that cultures are no longer considered to fit neatly in distinct regions but are merged

⁴⁹ When a gunman attacks a mosque in the name of Judaism, a Catholic IRA guerrilla sets off a bomb in an urban area, or Serbian Orthodox militiamen rape and kill innocent Muslim civilians, these acts seem to stereotype an entire faith. Similarly terms like ‘Islamic and Muslim fundamentalist groups’ play into a Western fear of the unknown, creating a stereotype which is linked with violence. The Institute of Islamic Information and Education (2009). Retrieved October 12, 2009 from: www.xploreheartlinks.com: www.xploreheartlinks.com/islam.htm

and inter-related⁵⁰. The “East” Payne seems to subtly critique and refer to in her work however, is a sweeping, comprehensive idea of the “East,” namely Said’s notion of the Orient (1978).

Payne’s work alludes to Said’s (1978) imagined stereotype of an “Eastern spiritual body”. The monk represented in *Awakening I* (2006) [fig. 2.18] is in a state of imagining. Perhaps the unusual, naked and exotic body subtly washed over his temple is an indication of what the monk might be visualising. The bound body which is faintly portrayed over the monk’s temple in *Awakening I* (2006) [fig. 2.18] seems to somewhat reflect the ‘West’s’ faint, sketchy understanding of ‘Eastern’ spirituality.

Although today, it may be frowned upon to view fundamental differences between ‘East’ and ‘West,’ the ‘Western’ perception of ‘Eastern religion’ as extremist and fanatical still exists. There is an underlying perception that connects the violent terrorist attacks in the ‘West’ to the ‘Eastern body,’ particularly the spiritual ‘Eastern body’. Such a connection has the potential to generate underlying feelings of suspiciousness and apprehension towards the ‘Eastern body’. It is ties such as these that Payne subtly draws reference to in her image of the bound body in *Awakening I* (2006) [fig. 2.18]. The question of whether Payne refers to an Eastern stereotype with the intention of chipping away at the fundamentals which supposedly “validate” and “reinforce” the East/West myth, or perhaps whether her paintings serve to perpetuate this fiction is an interesting one to note. Payne is certainly treading a fine line here, and it is important to consider whether some ambiguous aspects of her portraits serve to universalize the “Eastern” body, or whether they particularise these bodies in a nuanced way. The viewer may ask whether Payne’s work makes inroads towards separating the world into sections, or whether she successfully challenges this outlook.

⁵⁰ This is Papastergiadis’ (2000) notion of ‘deterritorialization,’ which emphasises the idea that mobility is a key feature of contemporary life and has led to fundamental changes in our understanding of culture, identity and community. The author discusses the latest theoretical concepts such as hybridity to suggest a new vocabulary and an alternative framework for understanding the relationship between cultural difference and modernity.

Payne's work may, on the surface, appear to have a universalising quality as her idealised subjects are inspired by a widely publicised film of a performance of China's Shaolin monks.⁵¹ Using soft, muted tones and a polished, glossy painting technique to give the skin of the monks a flawless texture, Payne does tend to exoticise the bodies of the monks through her painting style. This, coupled with her attention detail, particularly in her representations of the muscular form of the monks, serves to heighten a sense of eroticism in her work. Having said this however, her work does not seem to emulate "Western" norms of an expression of the 'other'. Considering how the subjects of Payne's work may undermine the stereotype of 'East' by looking distantly 'Eastwards,' it is interesting to read the book *Blackwomanhood: Images, Icons and Ideologies of the African Body* (2008:308). In this book, Barbara Thompson discusses issues of racial injustice, noting, "often the very same clichés that oppressed, objectified and misrepresented the body throughout history... serve as some of the most effective tools to disarm the racist tools that were used to exemplify these bodies." Using hints of an "Eastern" stereotype in her work Payne seems to reflexively draw attention to the absurdity and meaninglessness of a 'type'.

Payne's subjects face 'Eastward' towards a rising sun, towards the prospect of a new conception that allows for the remoulding and reformation of individualities. The directional inferences in Payne's work subtly challenge the significance of binary divisions, leading the viewer to consider the relevance of terms such as 'East' and 'West' in a contemporary transnational reality. Payne is in the process of articulating modernity outside of the "West," generating relationships

⁵¹ "The Shaolin Temple is situated in the beautiful Songshan Mountains in China. Shaolin has a long tradition of Chinese martial arts, partly because Shaolin was located in an area which had to be protected from wars and invaders. During the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), Shaolin housed over 1,000 soldier-monks who were often used by the government to combat rebellions and Japanese bandits. Martial arts were however forbidden during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) and even with the protection of soldier-monks, Shaolin was severely damaged by fire a few times. The largest fire set by the army of Shi Yousan in 1928 destroyed most of the buildings of Shaolin Temple." The Shaolin martial arts are considered important historical relics and the film which inspires Payne's work is of Shaolin Monks performing martial arts. (Walker.S:2009. Retrieved August 24, 2009 from: www.shaolin-temple.gungfu.com)

among different patterns that draw from words such as those of Stuart Hall (2003:10) who says, “we are embarking on a hundred different ideas of ‘the modern’...” For Payne, these subjects convey the “finding [of] a new language” and give expression to new emotions [she’s] feeling, new “fictions of self”⁵².

Conclusion

Veleko and Payne engage with issues of place, memory of a past and newly constructed identities in a transnational context. Their works reveal Africans as complex subjects in the modern world that refuse to be stuck in the past or defined in colonial terms. Expanding and developing definitions of contemporary African art, Veleko and Payne move away from the idea of categorising Africa art in terms of authenticity, geographical location or citizenship, instead they are involved in a restorying of African modernities, offering the possibility of living between worlds – transnational and diasporic worlds.

Veleko and Payne’s portraits carry delicate ties to the past and it is these ties which prompt dominant culture to consider its role in identity construction. There is a need for mainstream culture to reflect on its tendency to construct “fictions of difference and otherness that divide and distance rather than unite” (Thompson: 2008: 308). Tracing a thread from past narrations through to present realities where the notion of identity is fragmented, Veleko and Payne help to give voice to those who critique and disrupt mainstream practice in favour of alternative, discursive practices. If transformation is to be progressive, however, it is the mainstream – those who come together to influence decision worldwide – who have the greatest weight and potential to heavily influence, and drive positive transnational/ transcultural change.

⁵²Personal interview with Tracy Payne, Cape Town 13 March 2009

In the third chapter I examine representations of 'race' and 'gender' in the work of Veleko and Payne, noting how both artists loosen the strings of binaries, detaching the identity from typecasts of 'race' and 'gender.'

Images



Fig 2.1 Nontsikelelo Veleko. Chinese/Japanese. Liberty.
A key work from 2007. Archival pigment print on cotton rag paper. 47 x
34.5cm

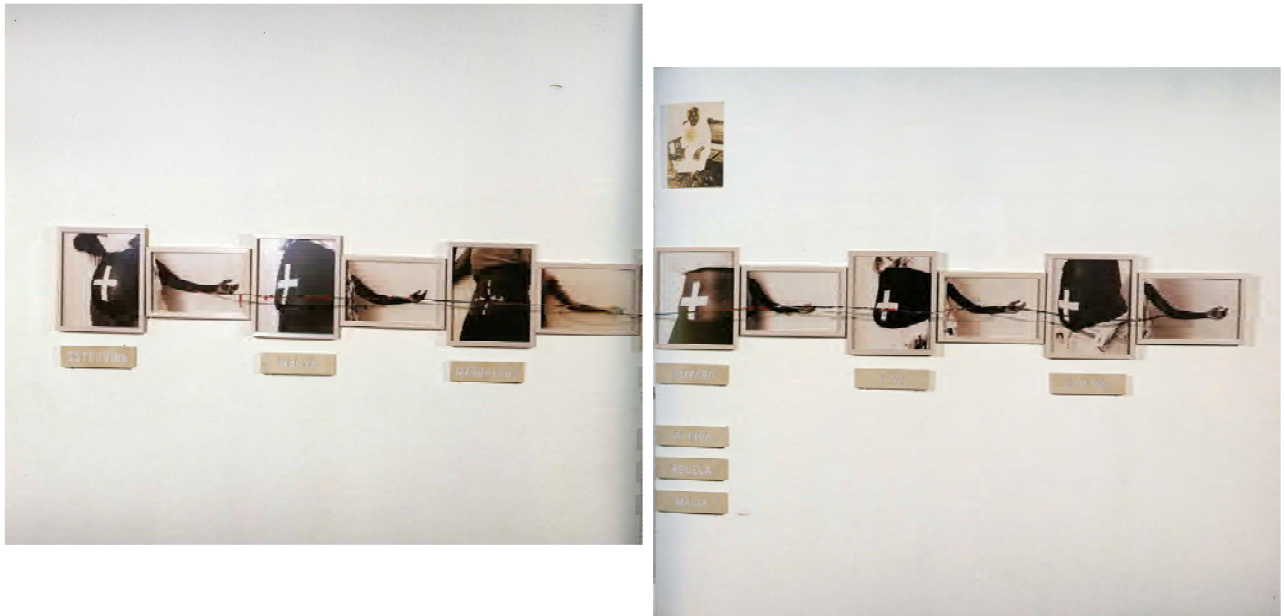


Fig 2.2 Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons. *Everything is Separated by Water. Umbilical Chord*. A key work from 1991. Mixed-media installation marble, woodcuts, amate (bark) paper, carved wood, wire, fabric, soil, colour photo prints. Approx. 99.1cm x 335.5 com. Hakim photography Museum of the National Centre of Afro-American Artists. Plate 6.

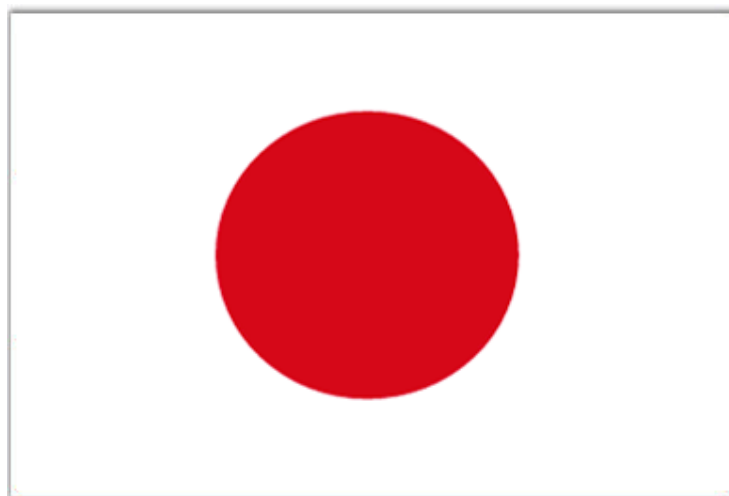


Fig 2.3 Flag of Japan



Fig 2.4 Nontsikelelo Veleko. *Chinese/Japanese. Love for Self*. A key work from 2007. Archival pigment print on cotton rag paper. 48 x 33cm. Demonstration print (from an ed. of 10).



Fig 2.5 Flag of South Africa



Fig 2.6 Samuel Fosso. *Autoportraits. Serie Tati*. Untitled.
1997



Fig. 2.7 Samuel Fosso. *Autoportraits. Serie Tati*. Untitled.
1997



Fig. 2.8 Samuel Fosso. *Autoportraits. Serie Tati*. Untitled.
1997



Fig. 2.9 Samuel Fosso. *Autoportraits. Serie Tati*. Untitled.
1997



Fig 2.10 Samuel Fosso. *Autoportraits. Serie Tati*. Untitled.
1997



Fig. 2.11 Peter Engblom. *Zulu Sushi*. KA 5044. A key
work from 2001. Archival Inkjet print on Cotton Fiber
Paper.

43 x 58cm



Fig. 2.12 Nathaniel Jocelyn. *Portrait of Sengbe Pieh (Joseph Cinqué)*. 1840. Original held by the New Haven Colony Historical Society, New Haven, CT.

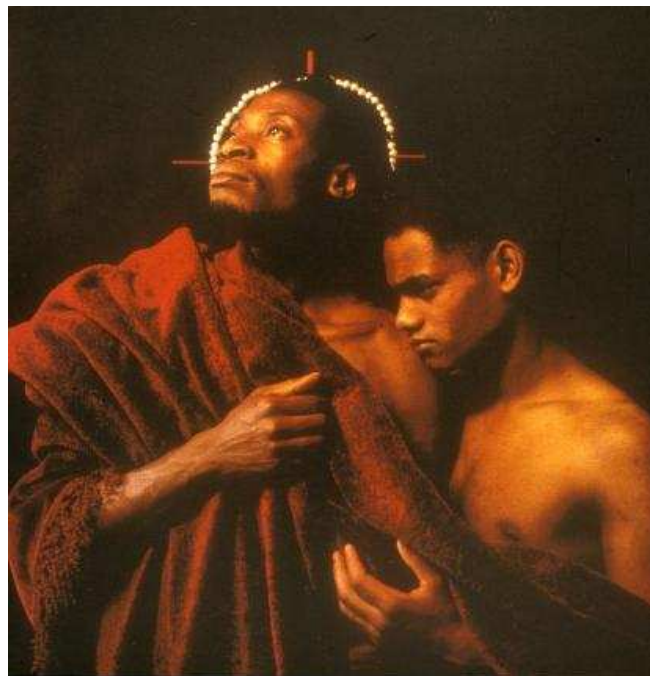


Fig. 2.13 Rotimi Fani-Kayode. *Every Moment Counts*. 1989. Cibachrome print 60 x 60 cm. Guggenheim Museum (New York 1996)



Fig. 2.14 Tracy Payne. *Sacred Yang*. Starburst Monk. A key work from 2007. Oil and glitter on combed acrylic on canvas. 180 x 256cm



Fig 2.15 Tracy Payne. *Sacred Yang*. Awakening II. A key work from 2006. Oil, glitter and gold pigment powder on combed acrylic on canvas. 128 x 180cm

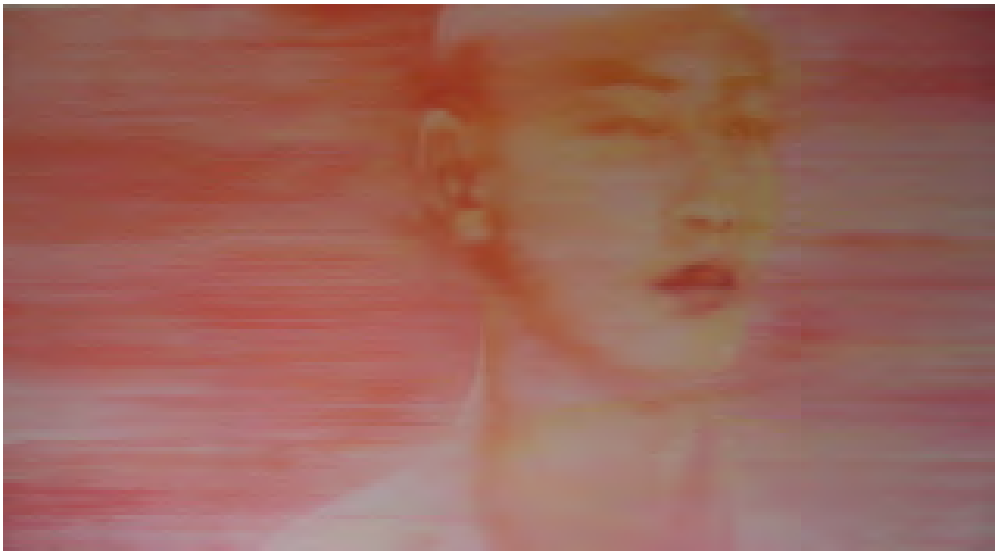


Fig. 2.16 Tracy Payne. *Sacred Yang. Beautiful Monk*. A key work from 2006.
Oil on combed acrylic on canvas. 128x 270cm



Fig. 2.17 Tracy Payne. *Sacred Yang. Emerald Monk*. A key work
from 2007. Oil and glitter on combed acrylic on canvas.
128 x 270cm



Fig. 2.18 Tracy Payne. *Sacred Yang. Awakening I.* A key work from 2006. Oil, glitter and gold pigment powder on combed acrylic on canvas. 128 x 180cm

Chapter Three

Untying typecasts: Considerations of “Race” and “Gender”

i) The art of creating identity: Sculpting the self

In his essay *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* Stuart Hall (1997:51) suggests that, identity should be thought of as “production” – that “which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation”. Consequently, each time we define ourselves, it is in response to someone or some establishment that requires us to do so (Hall 1997:51). In her study of identity construction Joy L. Lei (2003: 159) indicates that the creation of identity is a practice

Laden with commonalities, loyalties, power struggles, and survival instincts. It is at once an instinctive process that occurs from the inside out, involving community, acceptance, and comfort, but also a forged process from the outside in, which imposes on us, fixed categorizations and monolithic depictions.

Tracy Payne and Nontsikelelo Veleko are two artists working in South Africa who examine the struggles involved in identity representation. In a subtle manner these artists question the information that we as viewers and individuals use to make sense of who we are, who we are not, and who we can become (Britzman 1992). The work of Veleko and Payne destabilises the idea that an individual is bound to identify with that which has already ‘identified’ him or her. These artists skilfully create a detachment from those aspects of history, lineage and tradition which are often imposed on the self and seem to play a large part in foretelling who one is, or perhaps, is not. By combining fragments of extensive and varied information Veleko and Payne create complex, merged identities free from simplified binaries and typecasts typical of South African society.

In this chapter I examine the work of Veleko and Payne, paying particular attention to the way in which both artists expose and disrupt issues of “race” and gender in their representations of the body. I observe how both of these artists loosen the strings of binaries and typecasts of fixed norms of “race” and gender, and present the possibility of complex, tangled ideologies. Drawing reference to the way in which Veleko uses “masculine” notions of martial arts in her “African” self-portraits, namely *Liberty* (2007) [fig. 2.1] and *Love for Self* (2007) [fig. 2.4], I argue that Veleko complicates the Western stereotype of the eroticised and “orientalised” conception of the Eastern female body. Veleko effectively uses this tactic to break down binaries of colour, creating quirky, energetic identities that complicate simplistic stereotypes of South African “blackness”. Dealing with representations of “race” and gender in a nuanced way, Veleko’s work links to that of Payne, whose photographic portraits also deconstruct mainstream norms of identity. Payne’s *Sacred Yang* (2007) exhibition complicates society’s tendency to binarise gender by offering representations that are neither strictly “masculine” nor “feminine” but are perhaps a merged selection of the two.

ii) Gender: Performing the body

...Recognising that identity is contingent, is a performance,
provides the potential for rewriting the scripts of individual (and
group) identity (Gutterman 2001: 60).

The metaphor of performance provides an explanatory framework for understanding the contingency of identity. Performance, as Gutterman (2001:60) notes, does not suggest pretence or deception, but rather the act of presenting and practicing identity in relation to certain occurrences and requirements. Examining the practices of identity construction, Judith Butler’s (1990: 1993) work on the complex interactions between the subject, the body and identity

provides useful theoretical guidance. Butler's work considers the influence that systems of discourse and representation exert on identity construction, and goes on to note how this influence creates the need for the body to constantly restyle itself in order to materialize a sense of the "normative" ideal. This repetition of performative acts⁵³ serves to justify but also reveal new possibilities for expressions of the body, remodelling the supposed norm.

Central to Butler's (1990:33) argument is her understanding of the term gender, which she describes as "the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being". Butler (1993:2) refers to this stylised replication of acts as *gender performativity*, that she defines as "the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names". She argues that performativity functions to creatively generate the material of gender identities (1993:2). The material Butler speaks of here is that of, for example, appearance and behavioural traits, which are ascribed meaning, and it is this collective meaning that constructs and speaks for the gendered Other. As Butler states (1997:140) "mundane bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds" come together to "constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self". Such gestures and styles start to be viewed as an achievement, a "performative accomplishment... in which the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" (Butler 1990:141).

The performance of gender is repeatedly presented and acted through the media. Mainstream media seems to channel certain ideas of masculinity and femininity into popular culture.

⁵³ Butler (1990:141) uses the term "performative acts" to question the belief that certain gendered behaviours are natural, pointing out that "one's learned performance of gendered behaviour (what we commonly associate with femininity and masculinity) is an act of sorts, a performance, one that is imposed upon us by normative heterosexuality... Butler uses this term to question the extent to which we can assume that a given individual can be said to constitute him- or herself; she wonders to what extent our acts are determined for us, rather, by our place within language and convention." Accessed 20 October 2009 from www.cla.purdue.edu/academic/engl/theory/genderandsex/modules/butlerperformativity.html

Masculinity for example has become, as Connell (1995:52) notes “a certain feel to the skin, certain muscular shapes and tensions, certain postures and ways of moving [and] certain possibilities in sex”. The perfect image of masculinity in Western media emphasises the male physique as muscular, “top-heavy” and robust. Western ideals of masculinity portrayed in the media pair images of full-bodied, tough males with definitive techniques, rugged settings and solid, durable shades of colour. Stereotypes such as these are commonly communicated and promoted through television commercials. In an article titled *What’s Your Favourite Car?*⁵⁴ Jonathon Hardcastle (2006) writes,

Men love luxurious, high performance cars, preferably with a horsepower of 367 or more. On the other hand, women prefer cars that are affordable, practical and safe.

Hardcastle’s (2006) article implies that there seems to be a correlation with the values men look for in a vehicle and the values females identify with. Hardcastle (2006) notes that the vehicle registration statistics collected in 2005 and 2006 confirm that during this particular year DaimlerChrysler's Mercedes-Benz S55 AMG performance sedan was the most popular selling vehicle for males. Considering the predominantly male attraction to the new Chrysler Mercedes-Benz, an understanding of these male consumer’s gender identities is important, to provide marketers with the tools to effectively target this important segment. One may consider the commercial promoting this vehicle when trying to ascertain the values respected and admired by males in Western society [fig. 3.1]. The television commercial promoting DaimlerChrysler's Mercedes-Benz interestingly picks at male viewers’ preconceptions and apprehensions surrounding issues of gender. In the commercial,

⁵⁴ Hardcastle, Jonathon "What’s Your Favorite Car?." What’s Your Favorite Car? Accessed 18 Sep 2009 from *EzineArticles.com*: <http://ezinearticles.com/?What%E2%80%99s-Your-Favorite-Car?&id=338196>

A female fairy is floating among city skyscrapers, transforming the drab buildings into towering gingerbread houses at the flick of her wand. Next, her magic touch renders a dreary subway train into an oversized toy choo-choo. When she attempts to presto-change the featured, black automobile as it makeovers the city streets, she is repelled by the car and thrust against the concrete facade of a neighbouring building. A tough-looking man dressed in black, walking his equally tough-looking dog, says, "Heh, heh, silly little fairy!" (It is the spot's only dialogue.) In revenge, she then turns him into a preppy, pastel sweater-dressed man now walking four small Pomeranians on pink leashes, suggesting *Who's the fairy now?* He reacts with an approving squeal. The narrator concludes the commercial stating; the new Dodge Caliber is "anything but cute." (Commercial Closet Association: 2001-2009)⁵⁵

According to the Commercial Closet Association website (2009)⁵⁶ Chrysler's customer service department received several telephone complaints regarding this commercial:

The commercial generally earned negative ratings, largely because it was found to directly associate humour with the term "fairy" – referring not just to the type that flies around with a magic wand, but also to the universally recognizably gay stereotype of an effeminate gay man. Critics argue that the commercial could end simply and appropriately with the female fairy being repelled by the car's toughness.

The commercial plays into the weaknesses of male identity, predominantly the incessant need of males to act strong, powerful and masculine. In his book *Discovering Men*, Morgan (1992:47) notes that "gender and masculinity may be understood as part of a presentation of self, something which is negotiated, implicitly or explicitly over a whole range of situations". In short, Morgan (1992:47) writes, "we should think of *doing masculinities* rather than of *being masculine*". The

⁵⁵Commercial description accessed 18 September 2009 from <http://www.commercialcloset.org>:
<http://www.commercialcloset.org/common/adlibrary/adlibrarydetails.cfm?QID=2850&ClientID=11064>

⁵⁶Accessed 18 September 2009 from www.commercialcloset.org:
<http://www.commercialcloset.org/common/adlibrary/adlibrarydetails.cfm?QID=2850&ClientID=11064>.

advertisement implies that in order to ensure a sense of masculinity, males should “grab life by the horns” and guard themselves against the rebellious feminine fairy that flies around involuntarily changing reality into effeminate fantasy. This Chrysler commercial implies that effeminacy is something to be protected against, “dodged” at all costs, and one way to uphold and present the self in terms of masculine ideals is to drive the *All-New Dodge Caliber*.

Considering this commercial it is apparent that gender has been constructed to be a standardized principle, a concept of an ideal mould that can never be entirely achieved. “Gender norms” as Butler (1990:141) concludes “are phantasmatic and impossible to embody.” Butler’s observation here is interesting to note in relation to the work of Veleko and Payne who deal with a sense of illusion and apparition in their representations of the body.

iii) Dismantling the binaries of Gender: Veleko and Payne

As Butler (1990:141) proposes, gender norms are impossible to embody, and as such it is interesting to note how artists such as Veleko and Payne use the representation of the body to destabilise these norms. Using a variety of techniques to dispel a sense of the tidiness and consistency, Veleko and Payne skilfully challenge a concretised, dichotomous view of gender. Subtly entangling ideas of masculinity and femininity through their approach to dress, stylistic form and colour, Veleko and Payne delicately present the viewer with the prospect of an additional gender. In their book *Chinese Femininities* Brownell and Wasserstrom (2002: 5) suggest the possibility of “third genders,” and use this term to describe those “who are typed as neither male nor female but as [entities] that stand apart from binary and rather combine elements of (the two)”.

In the photograph *Liberty* (2007) Veleko looks downward, intentionally forbidding a comprehensible reading of her facial features. This skilful sense of masking is reinforced through

Veleko's loose fitting, black martial arts dress which falls slackly over her body, and serves to neutralise any indication or sign as to the subject's sex. Veleko's balanced posture and even tonal range of black, red and white, completely drain the image of a firm sense of masculine or feminine undertone. Veleko interestingly steers clear of tones such as pink, blue, purple and green which historically have relatively potent gendered undertones. Although there is no solid evidence to support the reason why certain colours contain hints of gendered undertones, the idea of colours such as blue and pink often seem to support the binary divide of masculinity and femininity in Western society.

In an article titled *Biological components of sex differences in colour preference* (2007) Anya Hurlbert, Professor of Visual Neuroscience at Newcastle University together with associate Dr Yazhu Ling, argue that women of two "distinct cultures" tended to prefer red tones, including pink, while a preference for blue was found among both men and women. Hurlbert (2007) controversially attribute these results to the hunter/gather role assigned to women about 10, 000 years ago, when men generally hunted while the women foraged for fruits and vegetables. Hurlbert and Ling (2007) argue that women became attuned to the red hues of ripe berries and other fruits and as such, women came to focus on the colour red (and the rewards associated with it) in order to make their search easier. Another argument is that sensitivity to the colour red/pink would also come in handy for recognizing flushed faces, a sign of illness, among the women's children. Hurlbert and Ling (2007) suggest that the colour blue in these times may have been attributed to "good weather" and a "good water source," responsibilities associated with the role of men.

One would only have to observe contemporary media, advertising or the ways in which the majority of mothers in popular culture dress their young children for example, to realise that there seems to be a conventional relationship between gender and colour. Although it is clear that

modern society tends to link pink with girly qualities and blue with boyish qualities, Hurlbert and Ling's (2007) study may be argued to be problematic. Besides the fact that Hurlbert and Ling base their study on assumption with little empirical evidence to back their theory, their study seems to be largely biologically centred. In this study, women for example, due to their supposed biological makeup, seem to be assigned a role and it is this role which seems to facilitate their inclination to notice the colour pink. However, gender and colour are both social constructions. This means that the social and cultural responsibilities of being male or being female cannot be fixedly correlated to colour as both terms are instable and subject to change. Having said this however, mainstream culture tends to manipulate and drive a synchronized relationship between biology, gender and colour. In *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Elizabeth Grosz (1994:21) notes that the body provides a point from which to consider the inflexibility of binary relationships⁵⁷. The body is variable, changeable and particularly specific by nature, and it is because of these aspects that it tends to be viewed as an effective site to challenge and undermine dichotomous, categorical accounts of the person (Grosz 1994:22). In her representations of *Liberty* (2007) [fig. 2.1] and *Love For Self* (2007) [fig. 2.4], Veleko seems to use the body to weaken rigid conventions which link gender to colour. Instead she uses colours such as black and red which do not seem to have obvious connections to Western attitudes on gender. It is in doing this that Veleko generates a sense of detachment and disconnection from Western philosophies surrounding issues of gender.

Veleko seems to create a sense of gender-neutrality and uncertainty through gesture, clothing and colour to challenge the way in which society tends to use external signs to categorize males in a way that separates them from females and cultivates a distinct sense of masculinity and

⁵⁷ Grosz (1994:21) is referring to "oppositions such as the inside and the outside, the private and the public, the self and other."

femininity. By creating a canvas of seemingly neutral signifiers, the viewer is at *liberty* to engage with the process of gender construction – loading and re-loading the photograph with masculinities and femininities he/she considers appropriate. Brownell and Wasserstrom (2002:22) note,

The male- female binary is not, in reality, a fixed, unchanging position. We can draw upon the classical philosophy of yin and yang to make our point here: as the proverb goes, there is femaleness in maleness, there is maleness in femaleness, and the two are in constant motion relative to each other...Westerners typically misunderstand the yin/yang dichotomy, assuming that yin “means” female and yang “means” male. In fact, yin and yang originally connoted shade and light but later had no fixed meanings. They were a way of describing relationships between things.

While Veleko’s work seems to interweave a sense of masculine and feminine, creating a “third” (Brownell and Wasserstrom 2002: 5) neutral gender through careful selection of open referents that are neither masculine nor feminine, Payne may be seen to undermine gender in a slightly different manner. In *Sacred Yang* (2007) Payne merges seemingly womanly referents such as subtle shades of pink and kitsch glistening tears of emotion with mannish fortitude, power and prowess (referents often displayed in mainstream media). Payne’s image *Starburst Monk* (2007) [fig. 2.14] boldly assimilates a variety of gendered components which coalesce and feed off each other, much like a relationship of yin and yang. The flamboyant cherry blossoms encircling the head of the monk may be read as a marker of gender interchange in the work. In most cultures flowers have traditionally been associated with femininity; their delicate petals, slight fragrance and alluring beauty are some of the superficial aspects which tie them to womanly characteristics. The link between blossoms and nature may bring to mind the debate which links nature to womanly characteristics and culture to manly qualities. This argument is one which lies

at the heart of dichotomous debates on gender. In her essay *Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?* Sherry Ortner (1974) suggests that women's widespread second rate standing was due to their association with nature; men, alternatively assumed authority through an association with culture. These debates seem to universally link women to birth, the origin of life and men to logical sensibilities. In their book *Theorizing Gender* Alsop, Fitzsimons and Lennon (2002:17) note,

The dichotomy between male as rational and capable of universally valid thought and female as emotional and tethered to the particularity of her body and situation is one that is still evident in patterns of thought today....For being male was defined in terms of aspirational *ideal* which characterised what men should be. The definitions of female were different in this regard. Being female was treated much more as a biological kind. This anchorage in biology restricted woman's nature.

By encircling the head of the *Starburst Monk* (his temple of sanctified thought) with flowers, Payne places 'nature' adjacent to so-called 'culture,'⁵⁸ effectively creating a situation where intellect and rationality are levelled with the natural world, so that each force is encouraged to "overlap" and operate side by side. In doing this Payne subtly undermines a dichotomous, polarised approach to gender and promotes a space in which traceable aspects of masculinity and femininity can collide, clash, and even merge, until differentiation is rendered impossible.

In some ways Payne's work may even be considered frustrating, for the reader is goaded to reposition what he/she may perceive to be a masculine or feminine image. For example in *Beautiful Monk* (2006) [fig. 2.16], the male Payne portrays has skin so translucently soft he could be female, but at the same time he displays facial features so chiselled he is undoubtedly male.

⁵⁸ Payne does not necessarily take cultural difference into consideration here; it is my assertion that the crown of flowers evokes a nature/culture divide.

This sense of uneasiness is subtly created by the artist's disruption of polarities and seems to be heightened through her lustrous, almost translucent brush strokes which paint colour into the monk's features in the same manner one may envisage a woman to apply makeup – with care and meticulousness. Yet despite the “womanly” manner of finery displayed through the cherry stained lips and highlighted brow bone of Payne's *Beautiful Monk* (2006) [fig. 2.16], the subject equally seems to hold a sense of “manly” valour and majesty. Payne's representation of a “third” gender (Brownell and Wasserstrom: 2002) is not one which evokes a disconnection from gendered signifiers (such as Veleko's work implies), but a representation which embraces the polarities of masculinity and femininity and merges them into one hybrid form.

In the following sections of this chapter I focus on unpacking stereotypes such as ‘Black’ and ‘Asian’ masculinity. I discuss how stereotypes such as these have been garnered in mainstream culture as a way of neatly containing and dealing with the intimidation of that which is non-Western and foreign and therefore viewed as alien, unknowable and unsettling. Considering these stereotypes I examine the manner in which individuals choose to resist and fracture Western hegemonic ideas. This discussion forms the basis for a critique of the ways in which Veleko and Payne choose to reinvent and reconstruct of the body in regard to stereotypes of race and gender.

iv) Hypermasculinity: “How to.. be a real man”

In their book *Theorising Gender*, Alsop, Fitzsimons and Lennon (2002: 143) note,

Hegemonic notions of masculinity demand that to be a ‘real man’ requires the rejection of all things feminine, in that masculinity is constructed in opposition to femininity. For men to conform to dominant ideas of manliness they must distance themselves from all traits and characteristics associated with femininity. Wearing pink, reading romantic fiction and caring for babies are cultural

symbols of femininity in Anglo-Saxon culture and thus regarded as antithetical to the demands of masculinity.

This notion implies that the further removed masculinity is from femininity the more concentrated it becomes; masculinity in this sense depends on the contrasting images of the feminised 'other' (Whitehead and Frank 2001). Psychologist Robert Brannon (2001:65) defines the idea of manhood in a summary of four concise phrases:

- 1) 'No Sissy Stuff' One may never do anything that even remotely suggests femininity. Masculinity is the relentless repudiation of the feminine.
- 2) 'Be a Big Wheel.' Masculinity is measured by power, success, wealth, and status. As the current status goes, 'He who has the most toys when he dies wins.'
- 3) 'Be a Sturdy Oak.' Masculinity depends on remaining calm and reliable in a crisis, holding emotions in check. In fact, proving you're a man depends on never showing your emotions at all. Boys don't cry.
- 4) 'Give 'em Hell.' Exude an aura of manly daring and aggression. Go for it. Take risks.

It is evident in these phrases that masculinity must be constantly proven, and one of the ways in which masculinity is commonly demonstrated and reinforced in contemporary culture is through the sport. Connell (1995:54) notes that,

In historically recent times, sport has come to be the leading definer of masculinity in mass culture. Sport provides a continuous display of men's bodies in motion...The institutional organization of sport embeds definite social relations: competition and hierarchy among men, exclusion or domination of [the feminine].

In the media, epic activities and sports films display the male body as being connotative of power and strength, honouring masculine spectacle in opposition to feminine gentleness and

beauty. In his book *Understanding Masculinities*, John Beynon (2002:65) notes that at the extreme the media openly “sexualises and eroticizes” the body. One such figure which continues to be sexualised through patriarchal media is that of the black male body. Hooks (1995:208) argues that slavery constructed “the black male figure as feminine [and it was in] resistance to this construction, [that] black males cultivated and embraced the hypermasculine image.” Constructing of the black male figure as feminine was a way of demeaning and lowering the image of the black male body. For many black males, competitive sport enhanced a “hypermasculine physique” serving to “counter theories of emasculation” (hooks 1995:206). Contemporary black males often use sports as one means of masculine self-expression within an otherwise narrow structure of opportunity. This heightened sense of masculine expressiveness is known as “hypermasculinity” and is often associated with an “excessively physical” black, male body.

Hooks (1995:206) identifies Jack Johnson and Joe Louis as two individuals who personify a hypermasculine image. Drawing reference to their fiercely handsome athletic qualities as well as the rebellious natures of these men, Hooks (1995:206) notes how these individuals “symbolised for black people of their generation, and black men in particular, an assertion of militant resistance to racial apartheid.” Through the sporting media these individuals, as well as other black, male athletes such as Michael Jordan, have been made to appear larger than life – fantasy figures⁵⁹ – and in the case of Johnson, a drinking, gambling, womanizing character, who gloated over his injured opponents and broke taboos to irritate white America. Contemporary media often professes the black male body to be overtly physical and powerful, “the embodiment of

⁵⁹ Hooks (1995:208) draws on the example of Michael Jordan to illustrate her point that often the image of a particular sporting body [such as Jordan’s] is used as a standard symbol in mainstream culture as a moneymaking scheme. The incident hooks is referring to is the commercial where she notes, “he speaks to the cartoon figure of Bugs Bunny as though they are equals – peers – his elegance and grace of presence is ridiculed and mocked by a visual aesthetic that suggests his body makes him larger than life, a fantasy character. This visual image presented as playful and comic, dehumanizes... No matter how much Jordan’s image is made to appear silly, ridiculous, even monstrous... the substantial monetary reward provided enough incentive to encourage submission to any objectified use of his person.”

bestial, violent, penis-as-weapon hypermasculine assertion” (hooks 1995:205), while little is presented of the intellectual capacity of the black male figure.

Hypermasculine images are not limited to sporting media; they extend into cinema and music video too. Gray (1995:403) notes that “by drawing on deeply felt moral panics about crime, violence, gangs, and drugs, [black musicians and performers] have attempted, often successfully, to turn dominant representations of black male bodies into a contested cultural field.” Further, Gray (1995:402) suggests “figures of black masculinity... consistently reconstruct the image of black masculinity into one of hyper-blackness based on fear and dread... [generating the idea] in popular imagination [that the black body is] the logical and legitimate object of surveillance and policing, containment and punishment”.

In the second chapter of this thesis I drew upon the writing of Barbara Thompson (2008: 308) who notes, “often the very same clichés that oppressed, objectified and misrepresented the body throughout history... serve as some of the most effective tools to disarm the racist tools that were used to exemplify these bodies”. Individuals such as Johnson, Louis and Jordan seem to have made use of their athletic prowess to reaffirm a sense of identity in mass culture. These athletes have used sport and its associations with masculinity in popular culture (Connell 1995:54) to aggressively and confrontationally heighten an awareness of the black male body. In the case of black musicians and performers, they too have used the tools of dominant, Western mainstream culture and disrupted the tidy, contained and racially biased nature of them to re-establish and reattach a sense of power to black male body. There is a sense here that offensive publicity is still some sort of publicity which is better than no publicity at all. It is this sort of exposure and hype which forces the black body to be taken notice of.

In this section I have discussed the term “hypermasculinity” to reveal an effective way in which stereotypes have been resisted and disrupted in popular culture to the extent to which the new, alternative personas have been incorporated into mainstream norms. Although Payne and Veleko resist stereotypes in a slightly more subtle manner, they also seem to use the tools of Western mainstream culture to present alternative concepts. Veleko and Payne use the gallery space which has historically been considered in the West to be a controlled, neutralised environment, to frame their resistance to Western ideologies and conventions surrounding issues of ‘race’ and gender.

v) The Emasculated male body

In Western mainstream culture the stereotypical representations of black males as physically aggressive, “seen as beasts, as rapists, as bodies out of control” (hooks:1995:203), has been constructed relative to a “feminine,” “mystical,” “passive” and “emasculated Asian male.” Asian males are often considered in Western mainstream culture to be docile, physically petite individuals who dubiously claim citizenship and place in Western nation-states. In his article “Out Here and Over There: Queerness and Diaspora in Asian American Studies” David L. Eng (1997:31) notes, that Asian identities, perceived from a Western outlook are considered more in conjunction with a discourse of “exile and emergence” than with one of “immigration and settlement.” Asian males living in the West seem to be stereotyped as passive, sissy and “devoid of manhood” (Eng 1997)⁶⁰. These problematic mainstream assumptions render Asian males as outsiders to a Western society. Eng (1997:33) notes that in order to advance from these

⁶⁰ Studying the sense of appropriation of “Afro” and “Oriental” individuals it is interesting to consider the work of Japan based performance artist Yasumasa Morimura. In an image titled *Black Face* (1970), Morimura “redoes” Edouard Manet’s *Olympia* (1863), playing both Victorine (Manet’s *Olympia*) and *Olympia*’s black maid (Laure). In this image Morimura’s slight, emasculated male body morphs into the black French servant, Laure. Morimura’s work serves to subtly critique and undermine categories of race and gender which seem to contain and restrict the body.

stereotypes of the ‘Other’, it is important to examine “how social relations within Western domestic borders inflect, and in turn are inflected by diaspora”.

In her article titled “(Un)Necessary Toughness?: Those ‘Loud Black Girls’ and Those ‘Quiet Asian Boys’” Joy L. Lei (2003: 162) examines the interplay and representations between two student groups, black females and South East Asian American males, in an American schooling institution, the senior school Hope High⁶¹. Lei (2003: 162) found that “Asian boys” as they were commonly termed, were frequently characterised by students, principals, teachers and other staff members as “quiet and clannish”. Lei (2006: 170) observes “it is the quietness and inconspicuousness of the Southeast Asian American male students that framed them as Other”. Lei (2006:170) notes one particular teacher’s perception of Southeast Asian American males, observing their behaviour outside the classroom to be “curious” and “mysterious”. These perceptions of Southeast Asian American males at Hope High School collectively emphasised a sense that foreign-ness. The slender physique and unassuming behaviour of these males served to emphasise a sense of weakness, seemingly confirming their marginal masculinity. The representation of Southeast Asian American males as small and weak translated into perceptions of them as “emasculated” (Eng 2001; Kumashiro 1999; Ling 1997) and easy targets for verbal and physical attack.

In her study Lei (2006: 177) presents some of the methods used by Southeast Asian American males at Hope High to counteract the construction of them as the emasculated Other. Performative acts such as breakdancing and driving “very pumped up” sports cars and sports utility vehicles, seemed to create a “tough” outer image for these Southeast Asian American males. However, Lei (2006:177) also notes that by implementing these presumed displays of

⁶¹ Specificities such as the schools exact address have been omitted in Lei’s (2003) article for safety and privacy reasons.

hypermasculinity, usually associated with African American culture, this “hard, rough-tough” image was not perceived to confirm or boost their masculinity in the eyes of their peers, but rather showed them up negatively as deviant academic and social beings. Lei (2006:177) notes,

As “new-comers” to preestablished gender and racial hierarchies in the United States, the Southeast Asian American males’ choices to be silent and invisible, to acculturate and adopt certain styles and behaviours, to physically resist the harassment they faced, were all acts of resistance to the negative production of them as abject beings.

Lei’s (2006:177) study confirms that resistance to the regulated racial and gender norms of the school environment often led to further marginalisation from school, encumbering academic achievement. Poor academic standing then served to support the substandard stereotype of Southeast Asian American males. Considering Lei’s study in a schooling system it is important to understand that the process of identity construction is weighed down with the effects of regulative norms and power dynamics. Bell hooks (1995) argues that in order to fracture mainstream perceptions of the male body, an innovative visual aesthetic must materialize that modifies, readjusts and reformulates, in order to create something fresh and novel to consider.

vi) Reinventing images of the male body: Tracy Payne

In the previous works Tracy Payne’s engagement with issues of the body appears to be somewhat violent and aggressive. In paintings such as *Coastal Resort* (1996) [fig. 3.2], *Sebastian* (1994) [fig. 3.3] and *Lemon* (1994) [fig. 3.4] Payne utilises unashamedly vivid and explicit imagery to destabilise sexual categories. In these works Payne blurs male and female genitalia, creating hybrid bodies which are boldly exposed to the viewer. In Payne’s images *Lemon* (1994) [fig. 3.4] and *Sebastian* (1994) [fig. 3.3], the viewer is placed in the position of voyeur, and looks into the scene of what appears to be a blond woman pleasuring herself. Closer examination of

Lemon (1994) [fig. 3.4] reveals what appears to be a somewhat abused male body, though the viewer cannot be sure of the sex of the individual as “her” genitals are masked and shadowed by clothing. In *Sebastian* (1994) [fig. 3.3] the male genitalia form a prominent part of the image and seem to directly contradict certain referents in the backdrop which appear to be nail-polish remover and purple-toned shaving gel, referents usually associated with females. This imagery seems to be a means for Payne to engage with her own dark side⁶² and the indistinct zones of interrelations. In an interview with the artist, Payne explains that these works were created in a dark period of her life; they represent a destructive, abusive period which she has subsequently advanced from and does not wish to reflect upon further⁶³. In contrast, the later work *Sacred Yang* (2007) stands as a cathartic, meditative response to Payne’s much earlier work and seems to complicate society’s tendency to categorise gender in a less obtrusive way.

Sensitively undermining homogenous perceptions of gender, Payne questions the stereotype of ‘masculinity’. Connell (1995:52) notes, a Western hegemonic male ideal is modelled as “independent, risk-taking, aggressive, heterosexual, and rational”. These attributes have filtered into our sub-conscious through the media and advertising and have constituted an essence of what it means to be male. In *Sacred Yang* (2007) Payne seems to employ techniques which fracture such conventions of masculinity, accentuating more tender attributes of the male body. Payne’s interpretation of masculinity seems to noticeably engage with some of the norms apparent in the media, such as the monks’ strong build which is hinted at in the chiselled facial features and upper shoulders of the *Emerald Monk* (2007) [fig. 2.17] for example, but these norms are understated as the monk’s torso is cropped out of the frame. *Golden Boy* (2007) [fig. 3.5] evidently discards mainstream norms in favour of a more apparent attachment to the tender, serene conventions associated with feminine and effeminate principles in contemporary culture,

⁶² In a personal interview with Tracy Payne in Cape Town, 13 March 2009, Payne made reference to the fact that these works were a way of communicating a difficult, dark period in her life.

⁶³ Personal interview with Tracy Payne, Cape Town, 13 March 2009

such as a hazy, soft-focus and gentle, pastel hues of colour. In *Sacred Yang* (2007) Payne seems to undermine the “certainties” of masculinity by intertwining a Western sense of masculinity, evoked in *Emerald Monk* (2007) [fig. 2.17] for example, with emotional “womanly elements” in a work such as *Golden Boy* (2007) [fig. 3.5]. In doing this Payne subtly presents the idea that “sexual and gender identities are fluid, unstable, contingent, distinct, but also entangled” (Gutterman: 2001:65). Examining the images of Payne’s *Sacred Yang* series (2007) the viewer obtains an underlying sense that hybridity seems to have replaced the familiar stereotype of tough masculinity.

Two images which may be argued to reveal sustentative evidence of a conventional sense of tough masculinity in Payne’s *Sacred Yang* (2007) series are *Grinderman I* (2007) [fig. 3.6] and *Grinderman II* (2007) [fig. 3.7]. Perfectly silhouetted against a solid black backdrop, the subjects of *Grinderman I* (2007) [fig. 3.6] and *Grinderman II* (2007) [fig. 3.7] perform martial arts poses with accuracy and precision. The shadow and contrast of black and white images, *Grinderman I* (2007) [fig. 3.6] and *Grinderman II* (2007) [fig. 3.7] draw attention to the muscular torsos of the monks introducing a hyper-realist, photographic element to Payne’s primarily loose and fluidly painted body of work. The strapping torsos of these men are distinctly lit and painted to reveal each shadow and groove of muscular definition. These two works deviate somewhat from Payne’s previous works in *Sacred Yang* (2007), forming a direct contrast to soft water-colour, washed images such as *Beautiful Monk* (2006) [fig. 2.16], *Starburst Monk* (2007) [fig. 2.14] and *Golden Boy* (2007) [fig. 3.5].

Payne’s use of *Grinderman* in the titles of her works *Grinderman I* (2007) [fig. 3.6] and *Grinderman II* (2007) [fig. 3.7] may in a tongue in cheek manner be questioning how the *gendered-man* is portrayed in mass media and popular culture. The word “grind” seems to generate thoughts of crushing with physical power or force. It is this driving sense of strength

and physicality that mainstream Western culture appears to encourage, uphold and present through the concept of masculinity. Discussing the works *Grinderman I* (2007) [fig. 3.6] and *Grinderman II* (2007) [fig. 3.7] Payne⁶⁴ explains that whilst in Japan she bought an small ink stick and grinding stone as these were used historically in Japan to produce ink used for painting and calligraphy [fig. 3.8]. The process of creating *Grinderman I and II* (2007) [figs. 3.6 and 3.7] Payne⁶⁵ notes, involved a lot of grinding⁶⁶ due to the paintings scale and very black background. It is the physicality of this grinding process that Payne seems to refer to in the titles of *Grinderman I and II* (2007) [figs. 3.6 and 3.7]. Considering the masculine sense of physicality implied by the word “grinding” Payne’s images in *Sacred Yang* (2007) series do not seem to epitomise a Western, mainstream sense of masculinity which tends to only engage with tough, physical masculinist feats. Payne’s monks instead actively engage with feminine sensibilities and religious sanctities as well as strong, sturdy masculinist acts (seen in *Grinderman I* and *Grinderman II* (2007) [figs. 3.6 and 3.7]), and make possible the development of a full-bodied, well-rounded sense of gendered identity.

Payne interestingly portrays the monks of *Sacred Yang* (2007) in a manner which evokes radiance, brilliance and light. Images such as *Golden Boy* (2007) [fig. 3.5] and *Starburst Monk* (2007) [fig. 2.14] seem to evoke lustre through their titling as well as their painterly, glittery sheen. Payne seems to use an at times kitsch sense of luminosity in her images in order to emphasise and bring to light an idea of perfection, suggesting a sense of the “ideal male”. This glowing, effulgent quality in Payne’s work also tends to evoke spirituality, as spiritual elements such as faith, truth, love and compassion are often expressed spiritually in terms of inner and

⁶⁴ Written correspondence with Tracy Payne, 22 October 2009

⁶⁵ Written correspondence with Tracy Payne, 22 October 2009

⁶⁶ In an interview with Payne in Cape Town, 13 March 2009, Payne described the making of this work to involve a lot of physical grinding to grind the ink which was used to paintings *Grinderman I and II* (2007) [figs. 3.6 and 3.7]. I note here that the word “grind” seems to also be a slang word used in popular culture to refer to hard work. The word also contains a sexual slang undertone, particularly a masculinist sexual undertone. These connotations are interesting to bear in mind when considering Payne’s *Grinderman I and II* (2007) works.

outer light. The link here between the concept of an “ideal male” and that of spirituality is interesting to note as spirituality is often considered to be at odds with the macho male visible in mainstream popular culture. This unusual combination links a spiritual sense of the “ideal” with a Western mainstream view of the “ideal,” creating ambiguity and tension. It is through this ambiguity that Payne creates uncertainty, subtly challenging and undermining fixed ideas of masculinity. As Grosz (1994:19) notes “where one body (in the West, the white, youthful, able, male body) takes on the function of model or ideal, the human body, for all other types of body, its domination may be undermined through defiant affirmation of multiplicity, a field of differences, of other kinds of bodies and subjectivities”. By inter-linking two sets of ideals here, Payne creates a field of pluralities and undermines the mainstream model of an ideal body.

Payne’s portrayal of the “ideal male” presented in *Sacred Yang* (2007) seems to stand against a fixed Western model of masculinity⁶⁷ which considers “male identity [to be] achieved [through] the constant process of warding off threats to it...achieved by the rejection of femininity and homosexuality” (Jeffrey Weeks: 1985:190). The monks represented in *Sacred Yang* (2007) appear to quietly embrace soft, tender qualities of masculinity. The subjects of Payne’s work appear to be in a process of constructing their male identities in close affiliation to the femininities which surround them and have a free and unfastened approach to gender, disrupting the views of Whitehead and Frank (2001: 23) who consider, as contemporary media seems to, that “anti-femininity lies at the heart of masculinity.” For the subjects of *Sacred Yang* (2007), a sense of masculinity does not come about through some superior attitude towards, or rejection of femininity. For these monks to rebuff or slight femininity would be to snub masculinity, for in the symbolic system of traditional Chinese cosmology, masculine and feminine energy is considered to be equally positioned, directionally proportional to and in constant interaction with each other. In their study of Chinese cosmology Brownell and Wasserstrom (2002: 26) note,

⁶⁷ Jeffrey Weeks (1985:180) draws reference to the socially constructed masculine in Western culture.

Yin and yang express complementary, hierarchical relationships that [are] not necessarily between males and females, even though yang was typically associated with masculine and yin with feminine principles.

Author of Asian Masculinities: the meaning and practice of manhood in China and Japan, Kam Louie (2003) notes that in Chinese and Japanese history, concepts of manliness have often been structured around the intertwining of two ideals. The first is associated with *wen* attributes (Chinese cultural behaviour, refinement, mastery of scholarly works), the other with *wu* qualities (Chinese martial prowess, strength, mastery of physical arts). Actively engaging with the philosophies of Yin and Yang in her work, Payne implies through her representation of merged expressions of masculinity and femininity that these terms should not be subject to binary division, but should be allowed to intertwine and complicate identity construction. As Brownell and Wasserstrom (2002: 29-30) note,

It is possible to learn a great deal about images of masculinity and femininity by looking at social types who are represented as liminal or transgressive figures – that is, as people on the fringes or completely outside of mainstream society, constant reminders that orthodox male and female roles are not the only ones that actually exist.

Payne effectively challenges the powerful and rigid displays of modern-day media by pushing a shifting aesthetic of gender into the visual field of contemporary culture which questions and fractures media norms – giving everyone, as hooks (1995:211) argues “something new to look at”. Traveling the circuits of Yin and Yang, Payne’s complex, intertextual imagery offers the viewer different and more complex ways of seeing and imagining. Payne’s work presents the viewer with a fresh opportunity to renegotiate, rechallenge and rewrite perceptions of masculinity and femininity.

Payne's work produces representations which challenge the goal posts of the term 'gender', allowing space for something in between masculinity and femininity to exist. This space of inbetweenness presents the opportunity for the existence of what David Gutterman (2001) terms "profeminist men". Gutterman (2001:65) notes,

Rather than [create] new categories of masculinity and femininity, or heterosexuality and homosexuality... Profeminist men use their culturally privileged status as men as a platform from which to... challenge the 'naturalness' of these divisions... [disrupting] categories of sexual and gender identity. This is often a delicate balancing act, but by contextualising and critiquing the closed category of male, heterosexual identity, profeminist men pose a unique predicament for cultural discourses of power. Much as heterosexual transvestites and macho gay men are especially disturbing to normative standards of masculinity, the slipperiness of profeminist men provides them with opportunities to be extraordinarily subversive. Thus, whereas women and gay men often are forced to seek to dismantle the categories of gender and sexuality from culturally ordained positions of 'other,' profeminist men can work to dismantle the system from positions of power by challenging the very standards of identity that afford them normative status in the culture.

The sturdy, robust appearance of the monks in the series *Sacred Yang* (2007), namely images *Beautiful Monk* (2006) [fig. 2.16], *Emerald Monk* (2007) [fig. 2.17], *Grinderman I* (2007) [fig. 3.6] and *Grinderman II* (2007) [fig. 3.7] allows them to remain affiliates of the Western masculinist society they critically assess while also modifying it. Appearing to conform to the Western masculine stereotype on the exterior, the monks, particularly those in *Golden Boy* (2007) [fig. 3.5] and *Starburst Monk* (2007) [fig. 2.14] effectively displace gender paradigms by subtly incorporating feminine elements into their assumed and intensely 'masculine' identities. The monks have a better chance of shifting gender norms from the position of 'insider' rather than 'outcast' and as a result of this, are able to peacefully manipulate the conventions surrounding issues of gender in society. Manipulating such conventions from a homosexual

position would most likely place an individual in the position to be ‘othered’ and slighted by society. However, as David Gutterman (2001: 67) notes

By utilising the fluidity of identity and the shield provided by cultural presumptions of normalcy, profeminist men can thereby gain access to other men and then reveal the ‘rewrites’ they have made in the cultural scripts of masculinity, as well as encourage, challenge, and nurture other men to rewrite the scripts of their own identity.

Payne’s monks are indicators of Gutterman’s (2001) “profeminist men”. Subtle “rewrites” in the “cultural scripts of masculinity” (Gutterman: 2001: 67) can be picked up through hints such as the titling of the image *Beautiful Monk* (2006) [fig. 2.16]. Payne’s image *Beautiful Monk* (2006) [fig. 2.16] appears to be male. By using the words *Beautiful Monk* in the image title, Payne seems to be inviting the viewer to question the idea of beauty as a term inextricably linked to female qualities. Discussing issues of beauty, Sylvian Bellenger (2006) notes that beauty is a term commonly used in reference to women,

Beauty-speak... suffers from gender bias, the implicit feeling that women, rather than men, are the primary objects, traffickers, and victims of beauty. While flowers, horizons, and works of art are often described as beautiful, to talk about human beauty is, more often than not, to talk about the female. The burden that women carry as the flesh-and-blood site of physical and conceptual virtue invariably makes any examination of beauty an exercise in gender-based obsession and prejudice, which if not subjected to vigilant self-scrutiny, easily metamorphoses into a body-centric, pornographic escapade.

Payne’s titling of this particular image effectively draws attention to the absurdity of “gender language” by playing on the implications of the word ‘beautiful’. Payne’s monks have tapped into a higher consciousness that operates outside the static, binarised, gendered distinctions of society. They journey through a state of self- reflexive awareness, consciously embracing and fusing both feminine and masculine aspects of self as they travel. *Sacred Yang* (2007)

cathartically deliberates the bearing and connotations of words such as “beautiful,” asking the viewer: Can a body operate outside the conventions of gender and still be considered beautiful?

In the following section I draw attention to the way in which Nontsikelelo ‘Lolo’ Veleko also disconnects herself from mainstream constructs. By sketching new transcultural narratives which dispel the rigidities of ethnic or social linguistic groupings, Veleko detaches herself from essentialised philosophies surrounding notions of ‘ethnicity’ in relation to ‘colour’. Using her body, Veleko effectively challenges the Western logic which has previously prevailed over identity construction in South Africa.

vii) Reconstructing images of South African Blackness: Considering issues of ‘race’ in the work of Veleko

The body is at one and the same time the ‘container’ of identity and subjectivity, the over determined point where differences collide... and a ground of resistance from which alternative counter-narratives can be produced (Stuart Hall: 2001: 31).

In *Wonderland* (2008), namely images *Love for Self* (2007) [fig. 2.4] and *Liberty* (2007) [fig. 2.1] Veleko uses her body to engage with what it means to be a South African black woman. Instead of allowing the attributes and histories associated with the terms “South African,” “black” and “woman” to define her identity, Veleko constructs an individualistic narrative by employing characteristic elements of Chinese and Japanese culture into her own way of life.

Dressing in Martial Arts attire, Veleko uses her body to face the reality of conventions, particularly the boundaries and the essentialised philosophies created by them. David Guterman (2001:57) notes that,

A framework of oppositional binarisms has historically provided the governing logic of identity formation in the West. This framework has

grounded identity in a series of either/or categories within which individuals are expected to exist.

South Africa is still in the process of recovering from the effects of the enmities of Apartheid, a period which enforced official racial segregation and separateness in the country from 1948 to 1994. Veleko uses the medium of self-portraiture to assertively disrupt a sense of polarity between self and “Other,” by incorporating cultural aspects which are unfamiliar yet of interest to her in her self-portraits. In doing this she challenges the logic of defining ethnicities by skin colour which has previously prevailed over identity construction in the West and over identity construction in South Africa in the recent past.

Drawing on powerful, respected Martial Arts sporting imagery in the works *Love for Self* (2007) [fig. 2.4] and *Liberty* (2007) [fig. 2.1], Veleko effectively inserts herself into the realm of African diasporic modernity. By linking Chinese nation and cultures with her own, Veleko operates in a contemporary culture which Hall (2003:11) notes, “can no longer be looked at through Orientalist prisms and essentialising approaches”. By merging and blending a series of South African and Chinese realities, Veleko dispels the idea of a purely “African” or “Eastern” body type, creating as Grosz (1994:22) notes “a plural, multiple field of body ‘types,’ no one of which functions as a delegate or representative of others”. The historical Western conception of an “Eastern” and “African” female body, seen as erotic and “oriental” becomes discharged as these new transcultural bodies no longer conform to the Western stereotype. Instead of continuing a typecast which construed “Eastern” and “African” females in terms of grotesque representations of savage sexuality and racial inferiority, Veleko uses her body to actively reshape understandings of South African identity, interlacing local and global contemporary experiences.

Effectively undermining this “either/or” format for thinking about identity that seemed to predominate during South African apartheid, it seems as if Veleko “reimagines the foundations

of identity construction and invents strategies of inclusion that make a space for thinking about... individualism” (hooks 1995:204). Through her photographs, Veleko effectively presents an altered way of dealing with identity politics in South Africa. In *Love for Self* (2007) [fig. 2.4] Veleko draws from within, reflecting on the enthusiasm she feels for the opportunity to explore a contemporary transnational/transcultural reality. Deliberating this, Veleko’s focus is also attuned to the “external”, imagining that which is foreign to a conventional South African way of life but which plays an intricate part in the construction of her identity. In this way Veleko helps to reform the political landscape of South Africa by producing and exploring what Grosz (1994:23) describes as “a range of possible metaphors other than the mechanistic ones which have dominated the history of philosophy”. Veleko is effectively creating transnational/transcultural perspectives which modify the way in which apartheid constructed South Africa as racially segregated in the past.

viii) Conversing through Clothing: Communication between “Local” and “East”

In *Love for Self* (2007) [fig. 2.4] Veleko, clothed in Martial Arts gear and lying in the tranquil outdoor space of her own back garden, draws near to a culture which may not initially appear to be “intrinsically” her own. However, her decision to incorporate Chinese and Japanese cultural elements into her individuality forms something new which is, indeed, her own. In her book *Salaula: The World of Secondhand Clothing and Zambia* (2000), Karen Tranberg Hansen discusses the shifting meanings of clothing in people’s lives, examining the changing processes that open up complex interactions between Africa and the world beyond it. The focal point of Tranberg Hansen’s work is the relationship between Zambia and the “West” and the way in which Zambians make use of and view Western secondhand clothing. Tranberg Hansen (2000: 248) suggests that,

A cultural economy of judgement and style is at work in local appropriations of the West's unwanted clothing. For second hand clothing is not just any commodity but rather a very special one: as dress, it mediates both individual and collective identities and desires, as an imported commodity, it opens a special exposure on interactions between local and the West.

Although in *Love for Self* (2007) [fig. 2.4] Veleko is not clothed in Western “unwanted clothing” and has instead appropriated clothing to look like Eastern martial arts attire, there is a sense that by dressing in this clothing Veleko is reforming individual and group identities and aspirations, revealing a sense of communication and exchange between the “local” and the “East”. Veleko uses her body and clothing as powerful instruments to develop dynamic relationships and influences that cross boundaries. Grosz (1994:23) notes that,

Both physical and social dimensions must find their place in reconceptualising the body, not in opposition to each other but as necessarily interactive.

Veleko effectively modifies local codes functioning in South African culture by extending the scope of interaction into a transnational field. Tranberg Hansen (2000: 253) notes with regards to Zambia,

There is a multiplicity of heritages at work here with complex dialectics between local and foreign influences, and between what is considered to be “the “latest” and what is current, in a reconfiguration process that [transforms] distinct local clothing.

This transnational/transcultural inclusion, combined with the implications of South African history brings together what Marion Young (1990:303) terms “the pure” and the “impure” – presenting a revisualised space where polarities feed off each other, mutating any definite sense of cultural alignment and focusing instead on the crafting of creolised, hybrid form of identity.

Tranburg Hansen (2000:227) notes that “meanings are attributed to clothes by acting social beings in particular situations and relationships” and it is in “making associations between articles of clothing and behaviour, that young people construct an understanding of their world and of how they inhabit it”. The “Eastern” clothing Veleko wears is incorporated into her reality and integrated into her local repertoire so that the idea of that which was “foreign” or “borrowed” becomes something reowned and built-in to that which is considered to be local. Veleko’s history as a black South African woman who is part of the transitions of a new democracy becomes woven into the *kimono* she chooses to wear, so that elements such as the crimson sash fastened to her waist begin to acquire new, layered meanings in a transmutable context. In this milieu terms such as “pure” and “impure” (Young 1990:303) which seemed so important during the 1948- 1994 apartheid era in South Africa⁶⁸, become indistinguishable and indefinite, weakening in importance.

Considering why Veleko would choose to dress in the sporting gear of Martial artistry, the viewer may consider the social impact of sport and the influence, competition and hierarchy it seems to generate in mass culture. Sport is a powerful organiser of gender relations, and recent history has shown that sport has the power to influence the exclusion or domination of women, by means, as Connell (1995:54) notes of serving as “symbolic proof of men’s superiority and right to rule”. In most contemporary environments, women have noticeably achieved equality with men in a variety of facets. Yet in sporting activities, since the physical strength of men tends to be greater than that of women, men operate as principal leaders in the sporting arena. The tendency of men to be physically stronger than women, dominating in sporting activities, may be one reason why men still value sport as a distinguishing factor of masculinity. Dressing in Martial Arts attire, Veleko subtly challenges the tendency of mainstream culture to view sport

⁶⁸ The idea of a “pure” and an “impure” race strengthened and reinforced the apartheid government’s decision to impose racial segregation laws during 1948 and 1994 in South Africa.

as a leading delineator of masculinity. Counterbalancing the narrow logic that closely associates sporting qualities with masculine prowess, Veleko uses strong connotations of sport in her self-portraiture to subtly give potency to her female identity.

Payne's Martial Arts clothing draws attention to the active/subjective nature of sport and in doing this also challenges, by way of a dialectic, the passive/objectified prejudices historically inflicted on Africa and the East. Dressing in Martial Arts attire Veleko undermines the validity and extent to which "Chinese culture" has historically been considered feminine and impotent in the Western imagination. Iris Marion Young (1990: 303) suggests that "any move to define an identity, (a closed totality), has always depended on excluding some elements, separating the pure from the impure". The "impure" has been termed as such, more from a fear of the unknown – of that which is "outside," "strange" and "different" than from any legitimate truth regarding a spoiled, tainted or contaminated quality, and as Appiah (2006: 113) suggests – even the notion that "contaminated" is necessarily a bad term in relation to culture is untenable⁶⁹. Veleko's photographs engage with aspects which have been "othered" in recent history, such as the black body which was considered tainted during South African Apartheid; the female (and "black") body in the international sporting arena – which still seems to come up against substantial impediments⁷⁰, and the Chinese body which has been orientalist by the Western imagination.

⁶⁹In contrast to Wim van Binsbergen's (1978) rather pessimistic notion of cosmopolitanization as contamination, it is important to consider Appiah's notion of contamination in his book *Cosmopolitanism*. According to Appiah (2006:113), "Cultural purity is an oxymoron," and in a section entitled "In Praise of Contamination" he writes: "When people speak for an ideal of cultural purity, sustaining the authentic culture of the Asante or the American family farm, I find myself drawn to *contamination* as the name for a counter-ideal (Appiah 2006: 111).

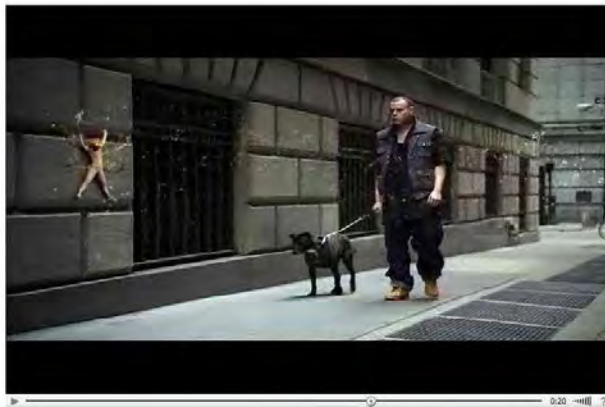
⁷⁰ A recent example of this is Mokgadi Caster Semenya, a South African middle-distance runner and world champion who won a gold medal in the 800 metres at the 2009 World Championships in Athletics. Following her victory at the 2009 World Championships, questions about Semenya's gender were raised, opening the possibility of a hermaphrodite identity. Athletics South Africa President Leonard Chuene admitted on 19 September 2009 to having subjected Semenya to gender tests, lying to Semenya about the purpose of the tests and to others about having performed the tests.

Mail Online. 'Inquiry launched into conduct of officials in Caster Semenya affair.' Published by Associated Newspapers Ltd: Part of the Daily Mail, The Mail on Sunday & Metro Media Group.
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/other/sports/article-1216334/Inquiry-launched-conduct-officials-Caster-Semenya-affair.html> Updated 26/09/09. Accessed 28/09/09.

Veleko's *Love for Self* (2007) [fig. 2.4] and *Liberty* (2007) [fig. 2.1] works each have a way of negotiating the anxiety between tradition and modernity, a tension which Hall (2003:32) notes, is "so critical to Africa's troubled, ongoing dialogue with its Others". The titling of *Liberty* (2007) [fig. 2.1] for example, "speaks of a historical conjecture," (Hall 2003:32) a time (during the apartheid era) when the majority of South Africans were not free to move between imposed local boundaries. However, *Liberty* (2007) [fig. 2.1] is also "engaged in a process of remapping," (Hall 2003:32) charting previously unexplored territories of transnationalism. Veleko uses the implications of stagnant apartheid history as a springboard to create offbeat, spirited identities. Clothing forms a rich site from which to examine these possibilities (Tranburg Hansen 2000:227) and Veleko effectively makes use of clothing in *Wonderland* (2008) to consider who she is and who she'd like to become.

Merging inter-cultural realities into her self-portraiture through clothing, enables Veleko to re-energize and recharge the body with currency and strength to operate efficiently in a transnational marketplace. Veleko's self-portraiture forms part of a discourse which charts new journeys, broadening and informing a complex understanding of South African subjectivities. Using fantasy and clothing as sites to liberate herself from past affliction, Veleko advances beyond the restrictions of oppression – challenging the limitations of what it means to be "black", "female" and "South African" and complicating simplistic views surrounding these terms. It is in this regard that Veleko's work contributes to the broader context for discussions of body politics, constructing a new intellectual framework for critical considerations of South African identity, which reconsiders issues of "race", gender and nationality.

Images



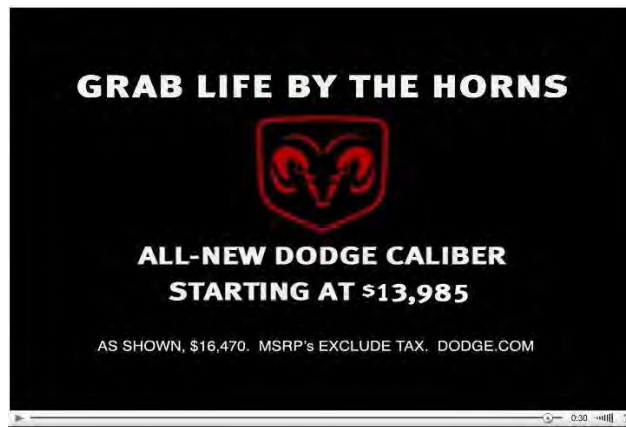


Fig. 3.1 Commercial created by BBDO Detroit, part of BBDO International and the Omnicom Group Inc. 2006.



Fig. 3.2 Tracy Payne. *Flashback*. Coastal Resort. A key work from 1996. Pastel on paper 115 x 81cm (framed).



Fig. 3.3 Tracy Payne. *Flashback. Sebastian*. A key work from 1994.
 Pastel on paper
 100 x 69cm (framed).



Fig. 3.4 Tracy Payne. *Flashback. Lemon*. A key work from 1994.
 Pastel on paper. 120 x 90cm (framed).



Fig. 3.5 Tracy Payne *Sacred Yang Golden Boy* (2007) A key work from 2007.



Fig. 3.6 Tracy Payne *Sacred Yang Grinderman I* (2007) A key work from 2007.



Fig. 3.7 Tracy Payne *Sacred Yang Grinderman II* (2007) A key work from 2007.



Fig 3.8 Ink Stick and Grinding Stone used to create images
Grinderman I (2007) and *Grinderman II* (2007)

Conclusion

The thread of movement and the exceeding of boundaries is deep-rooted and continuous in Veleko and Payne's work. There has been a tendency for African art to be bound by notions of "authenticity," a concept which perpetuates the idea of a stagnant, continual "African tradition," and inhibits the space for the assertion of distinctive interpretations of what it means to live in Africa and/or be considered "African" today. Nontsikelelo "Lolo" Veleko and Tracy Payne engage with the notion of boundaries and the restrictions imposed by them as a means of opening up and complicating the title "African". Shifting perspectives surrounding labels of 'race' and gender, Veleko and Payne create a space for concepts such as "blackness" as well as "masculinity" and "femininity" to be re-performed. The re-enactments of these constructs challenge prevailing norms and allow for the communication and expression of individual contemporary experience. Veleko's and Payne's works discharge the idea of fixed understanding of what it means to be "masculine", or "black" for example, rather the works of these artists encourage a dialogue where views can be exchanged, reconsidered and reinvented.

Nontsikelelo "Lolo" Veleko's self-portraits deal with gendered notions of "East" and "West" in a quirky, fun self-reflexive manner. Since Said's *Orientalism* (1978), gendered notions of "East" and "West" have been revised extensively forming a weighty collection of terms which once implied, need to be followed through with laborious unpacking, examination and re-examination, almost always employing a host of inverted commas. Veleko's works are playful; they draw on Said's notion of *Orientalism* (1978) just enough to infer the prejudices implicit in the term *Orientalism* (1978) but not enough to warrant a heavy tangent or digression into the knots of the past which may deliver contemporary experience as secondary or almost disregarded. Veleko makes contemporary experience her priority. *Wonderland* (2008) reflects an engagement in the

attitudes and sentiments on the streets of South African reality. South Africa is currently in the process of forging new links with China; these relationships are fairly recent and Veleko's work indicates the excitement of these new ties and possibilities.

Critiquing the concept of limits and boundaries of social classification, Veleko advocates a sense of freedom of cultural association, free from weighted terms which deter individuals from exploring a variety of cultural practices and by extension forging intercultural links and alliances. Veleko's work shows how African imaginations of the self in popular culture are born out of disparate but often intersecting practices. Her photographs seem to lightheartedly draw attention to issues of "race" through *selfstyling* (Mbembe 2002: 242). By emphasizing intercultural contingency, Veleko opens up a gateway for new (South African) subjects to be formed.

Veleko disqualifies the idea of Western fictional representation of Africa, opening up a space in which Africans can finally narrate their own fables in relation to China. Achille Mbembe (2008:56) uses an open-minded term to refer to South Africa "*transnational country*, a political entity formed over centuries by people coming from all over the world". South Africa, Mbembe (2008:56) notes "is a country that belongs to Africa, but also to Asia and parts of Europe". Veleko clearly displays the influences and new discourses of this transnational reality, representing a new generation of African diaspora artists living and working on the transnational soils.

Tracy Payne explores these mobile, indistinct and ambiguous states of identity in her *Sacred Yang* (2007) paintings. For Payne the notion of identity is not about an either /or affiliation (to either right or left, inside or outside, east or west), it's about possibility – having the option to belong to either sectors of a binary, or neither at any given moment. Identity, for Payne, is about

an affinity with different groups in different places, and an ability to enter and exit these groups. Payne's sensitive involvement with issues of gender creates a space wherein "masculinities" and "femininities" integrate into one another and engage in a complex dialogue which constantly destabilises the idea of a fixed gendered binary.

The concept of labels, of "African-ness" (by extension "blackness"⁷¹), "masculinity" and "femininity" are notions which are thought of as an end point, an objective already delineated by societal norms which regulate what is "black" from what is not, what is "masculine" from what is "unmasculine". The subjects portrayed in Veleko and Payne's work operate on the sites of crossing. This interceding between categories, allows for the blurring of ideas of "African/Chinese/Japanese"⁷² and the interweaving of "masculinities" and "femininities," to interweave to the extent to which mainstream norms are rendered obsolete. Veleko and Payne reconfigure norms from a position of lived experience – where cultures are not separated by a heavy, impermeable curtain of a boundary, and genders do not follow strict divides. These artists pose questions to existing social structures and show that identity is lived rather than achieved or simply recited from social prescriptions.

Sixteen years after the end of apartheid, sees artists embracing and contributing to the new country. This is not to suggest that that all is prosperous in South Africa, that the injuries of the apartheid years have been enigmatically treated and that the inequalities based on privilege have all been rebalanced and restored. There is no doubt that for many the pace of alteration is slow. A

⁷¹ The idea of authentic "African-ness" is often associated with "blackness," it is labels and narrow perceptions such as this that Payne and Veleko undermine in their work by creating new links and possibilities of what it means to be considered "African" and operate in Africa today.

⁷² There is a shift here from stereotype blurring, that is a derogative assumption that Chinese and Japanese cultures are the same, or almost indistinguishable to the point that it is impossible to understand the intricacies which may differentiate them, to something that is more deliberately transnational. Transnational integration works to incorporate the intricacies of diverse cultures so that cultures may inter-relate and feed off each other's beliefs and understandings.

key aspect of progression in South Africa stems from the fact while focusing on the local and working to affect transformation of organisations in South Africa, artists keep their sights on the international frame. The arts community affects transformation by presenting fresh rounds of critical debate. Issues such as transnationalism, posed in the South African arts scene and abroad, questions notions of movement between countries, memory and homeland in which all generations are represented. Contemporary local galleries in South Africa such as the Goodman Gallery (which represents photographer Nontsikelelo “Lolo” Veleko) and the Michael Stevenson Gallery (which represents Tracy Payne) are instrumental in creating a dialogue between artists operating in the Africa and those who work abroad, helping to enrich discourse and exchange of ideas in an African context. Online, Artthrob, started in 1997, continues to give regular reviews and information on the country’s art events, and another progressive step was made when Bell-Roberts Publishing initiated the quarterly *Art South Africa* magazine under the editor Sophie Perryer in 2002. The South African arts scene continues to construct an upward course of progression which seems only to improve with the passing of time.

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