An ideological analysis of the construction of masculinity in the South African superhero comic book, *Kwezi*

THESIS

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Abstract

In 2014, South African artist and comic book illustrator, Loyiso Mkize created *Kwezi,* South Africa's first superhero comic book. His comic features the titular Kwezi as a young, black man living alone on the outskirts of Gold City who discovers he has superpowers. Along with Kwezi, the comic is populated by predominantly black African characters – both good and bad. The creation of *Kwezi* is an important step in the development of comic books in South Africa as it draws from the cultural and physical landscape of the country and speaks to young black people without them having to look outside of the country for superheroes to identify with. Stuart Hall (Hall, 1997, pp. 272-274) asserts that attempts to reclaim the black subject in popular culture tend to go through two phases. In the first phase blackness is liberated from negative representations and is replaced with more positive depictions. Thereafter though, the black subject is produced inside contemporary "regimes of representation". In this thesis, I will show how Mkize's representation of Kwezi follows Stuart Hall's description of the reclamation of black subjectivity. Using narrative theory, visual social semiotics and Thompson's modes of operational ideology I will show how in his attempt to represent African blackness positively, Mkize overlooks normative genre representations of masculinity and produces a story of a South African that remains unliberated from patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity. Mkize reproduces many of the hegemonic discourses concerning the masculine body, the power difference between male and female characters and subscribes to the justified, violent actions of the masculine superhero. Typically, in superhero comics there is an erasure of the ordinary man in favour of an excessive and powerful one-dimensional masculine ideal (Brown, 1999, pp. 31-32) At the end of my analysis I will show that Kwezi is constructed in this way as a physically strong and muscular, violent and emotionless, self-made man who is in control and overcomes all obstacles.

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Chapter one
Introduction

As a young, white, South African boy growing up in the 1990s, the fantastical stories within superhero comic books and television series provided me with hours of entertainment. What was unknown to me then, was that these superheroes were providing me with something of a blueprint for my masculinity. As I got older, I found that the man I was becoming did not match up to the musclebound, wise-cracking, villain-punching superheroes of my youth, and that I was at odds with the common representations of masculinity in popular superhero comic books. This personal revelation about masculinity in superhero comic books made me cognisant of the larger process of socialisation affecting my masculinity. This deep personal experience has created a desire to understand the multiplicity of masculinities that exist within my local South African context (Morrell, 2002, p. 312), and how the media – more specifically superhero comic books – may contribute to the construction or deconstruction of these masculinities (Morrell, 2001, p. 6).

Although it is tempting to state that the beginning of the superhero comic books was the creation of Superman by Jerry Seigel and Joe Shuster in the 1930s, I would be at fault if I did not acknowledge those comic book heroes that came before and that paved the way for Superman's success. The publication of newspaper comics such as the German *Max and Moritz* by William Busch and the New York World's *Yellow Kid* by Richard Felton Outcault in the late 1800s were the first steps towards the comic books of today (Robb, 2014, p. 31). These sequential weekly strips that followed their small heroes and their adventures, grew in popularity with the term 'comic book' first being used to describe Outcault's *McFadden's Row of Flats* in 1897 (Robb, 2014, p. 32). By 1922 magazine-style reprints of the collections of these comic strips were a regular sight at the American news-stand (Robb, 2014: 32-33).

The rise of silent movies starring the actors like Douglas Fairbanks in the early 1920s gave rise to the popularity of the masked, costumed hero with features starring heroes like Zorro and Robin Hood (Robb, 2014, p. 33). Along with silent films the American pulp magazines helped create the selfless crime fighter with the creation of heroes like the Shadow, Doc Savage and the Spider (Robb, 2014, p. 37). These three heroes, alongside Will Eisner's *Spirit,* are the closest to superhero comics prior to Superman's debut in Action Comics #1. But there

were many more than just these crime fighting heroes that contributed to the comic book superhero. Science fiction and fantasy pulp heroes like Edgar Rice Burroughs' *John Carter of Mars* (1912) and *Tarzan* (1912), Philip Francis Nowlan's pulp space hero *Buck Rogers* (1928), Robert E. Howard's *Conan the Barbarian* (1932), and Alex Raymond's newspaper-strip hero *Flash Gordon* (1934) were all prototypes of the superheroes who contributed to the iconic characters we are so familiar with today (Robb, 2014, pp. 41-42). All superheroes have borrowed themes, qualities and traits from these science fiction and fantasy pulp and comic book stories, and they owe a lot to the artists and writers that created them (Johnson, 2012, p. 27).

The contemporary Western world of comic books is dominated by two large companies: DC (Detective Comics) and Marvel Comics (Ryall & Tipton, 2009, p. 35). But before they became the global phenomenon they are now, comics and the companies that produced them had humble beginnings, with few comics reaching the mass public (Johnson, 2012; Robb, 2014). This all changed with the publication of *Action Comics #1*, the first appearance of Superman, and the emergence of the superhero genre in the late 1930s across America (Robb, 2014; Růžička, 2010, p. 1; Ryall & Tipton, 2009). Comic book historians have noted that the sudden explosion of popularity of Superman during the Great Depression was due to the superhero's response to the social context (Johnson, 2012, p. 6; Ryall & Tipton, 2009). In the first issue, Superman saves a woman wrongfully convicted of murder and on death row, punishes a wife beater, and destroys a car full of criminals that make inappropriate advances towards his later love interest, Lois Lane (Johnson, 2012, p. 8). Superman dealt with issues experienced by much of the working classes in America at the time, and having a superhero doing what the government would not (even in fiction), gave the comic great public relevance (Johnson, 2012; Robb, 2014). However, this is very different from the Superman we know today, who espouses a much less brutal approach to solving the Earth's, and sometimes the universe's, problems (Robb, 2014; Johnson, 2012). Superman has changed as America has changed, and the audience of comics has developed (Růžička, 2010; Johnson, 2012). Since the origin of Superman, American superhero comic books have gone through countless iterations, restarts and successes, depending on the market, audience, government intervention and socio-cultural context (Johnson, 2012; Robb, 2014; Ryall & Tipton, 2009). Over this 100-year journey, Marvel and DC have emerged as the dominant producers of

superhero comic books all over the world with alternate imprints[1], toy lines, board games, video games, successful online series and Hollywood blockbuster movie frachises (Ryall & Tipton, 2009, pp. 20-25).

The much younger South African comic book industry is not flourishing like its older cousin and seems to be caught in an uneven economic and cultural struggle with the American comic book industry (Mason & Opperman, 2018; Spiller, 2018). There is a small niche audience for superhero comic books in South Africa and so publishers are reluctant to invest in supporting comic book creators[2] (Smit, 2018). This has led to many South African artists and writers attempting to self-publish their comic books which has become the norm in the South African comic book industry. This results in the majority of comic books fading into obscurity due to poor or no funding, and often very little public support (Mason & Opperman, 2018, pp. 33-34; Smit, 2018). South African comic books are thus stuck between mimicking the dominant form, and being compared to their American counterparts, or creating a counter cultural artefact that seems powerless against a well-established industry (Mason & Opperman, 2018; Smit, 2018). It is within this context that Loyiso Mkize set out to create a comic book that "informs [young South Africans'] perspectives and how they see themselves" through his South African superhero, Kwezi (The Daily Vox, 2018; Smit, 2018), the eponymous hero of the comic.

Kwezi is a young, disaffected black man living alone on the outskirts of Gold City who discovers he has superpowers. In the first six issues the reader sees Kwezi lose his powers after meeting a group of South African would be superheroes, and later regain them as he learns to come to terms with his responsibility as a superhero. In issue 5 & 6 Kwezi travels to a mountainous island to regain his powers. This story arc[3] bears a passing resembance to the Xhosa traditional initiation ceremony in which boys become men. However, the actual ceremony has marked differences. For example, the actual ceremony is guided by older

[1] Imprints is a term used to describe companies that publish comic books under different company names, but which still belong to an umbrella company. For example: Paramount Comics belongs to Marvel and Vertigo Comics to DC.

[2] Comic books are the product of many efforts from many different people including: artists, writers, colourists, letters, editors and more (Eisner, 2008; McCloud, 2006). I will collectively refer to this group of people as comic book creators.

[3] A story arc is an extended or continuing storyline ongoing throughout many issues of a comic. These story arcs often have their have their own title, with each issue being a chapter in the story.

Xhosa men and these men are often joined by sangomas[4], neither of whom are included in this story arc in *Kwezi*. The ceremony itself is also not spoken about publicly by the amaXhosa[5]. This might be why Mkize only chose to make a veiled, rather than a blatant, reference to the initiation ceremony, but the reference is present none-the-less (Wright, 2018, pp. 208-209). The story follows Kwezi and the other superheroes as they grapple with the villian, Mpisi, and his schemes. This culminates in issue 12 with a public showdown between Kwezi and Mpisi, in which Kwezi falls into a trap set by the villian to create an intense anti-superhero sentiment in the citizens of Gold City.

Kwezi's narrative represents many different social issues which are indicative of the South African socio-cultural context in which it was produced. The reader will come across representations of masculinity, femininity, gender relations, shifting representations of black identities, modernity versus African tradition, and more. Within the comic the superheroes and their environments serve as vehicles for questions about the nature of gender relations and black identity against the backdrop of the emergence of black political and economic power in South Africa (Wright, 2018, p. 218). My focus in this study, however, is the representation of masculinity, more specifically, the representation of Kwezi's masculinity as the protagonist of the story. Therefore, as the titular superhero, the types of masculinity he represents are important because they could potentially contribute to defining the South African superhero, and the 'ideal' South African masculinity.

There are other male characters in the comic that represent other masculinities. These include Mohau, Khoi, and the villain Mpisi. Mohau represents the wise and strong Basotho elder whose obsession with the prophecy and spirituality in the comic book align him with the more precolonial or culturally 'traditional' South African masculinity, versus the post-colonial, capitalist, urban masculinity of Kwezi (Morrell, 1998, p. 612; Wright, 2018). The traditional masculinity, in the context of South Africa, can be linked to cultural ethnic practices, like the aforementioned Xhosa male initiation ceremony (Morrell, 2001, pp. 23-29; Wright, 2018). There are other elements such as dress, family structure and religion that

[4] These are highly respected healers and spiritual guides among the many South African ethnic groups. They often diagnose illness and performs rituals to heal a person physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually. This involves divination, herbal medicine, and specific rituals to cure illness and restore well-being.
[5] The recent outcry against the film *Inxeba: The Wound* regarding its representation and revealing of the Xhosa initiation rite, along with the representation of homosexuality, is one example of the controversy surrounding the ceremony and the demanded secrecy by amaXhosa men.

might differentiate this masculinity from the urban masculinity, and other masculinities vying for power in South African gender relations (Morrell, 1998, p. 613). These masculinities are both patriarchal, enjoying what Connell calls the patriarchal dividend, but are in competition with one another for dominance in the masculine gender order in South Africa (Morrell, 1998, p. 608; Wood & Jewkes, 2001). Khoi is a blind, barefoot archer whose character indicates a more subtle anger directed at the violent destruction of his village and family by mercenaries – possibly an allegory for the violent intrusion of colonialism in South Africa. Mpisi's character is one of the newly free bourgeoisie described by Fanon, who after liberation finds the opportunity to occupy the positions of power formally held by the oppressors (Wright, 2018, pp. 220-221). His ability to transform into a hulking hyena further solidifies his predatory character. These masculinities are important, but as this is a limited study, I will focus on the construction of Kwezi's masculinity.

Mkize's entrance into comic books was through his work on *Suprastrikas* - the highly successful South African soccer comic book that has gained international popularity (Wright, 2018; Mason & Opperman, 2018, p. 49; Smit, 2018). After leaving Strika Entertainment (the publishers of *Supastrikas*) in 2014, Mkize began his journey as a superhero comic book creator. From 2014-2015, while struggling to find a publisher for *Kwezi*, Mkize self-published his first three issues of *Kwezi*, each about 10 pages long (Watson, 2018, p. 209). He even pubished his first issue for free on the online publication platform *ISSUU*, which can still be viewed on the website. Two years later *Kwezi* was bought by the publisher *DavidPhilip* who republished the first three comics in one book as a collector's edition in 2016 (Smit, 2018; Watson, 2018, pp. 209-210). *DavidPhilip* has continued to publish three-issue compilations every year since, which are available in bookstores and speciality comic book shops across South Africa, as well as for order online (Smit, 2018; Watson, 2018). This has elevated the status of *Kwezi* as a superhero comic book because of its availability to a larger South African audience (Smit, 2018; Wright, 2018) – albeit one that is part of a small niche market of comic book buyers in South Africa[6].

As a cultural phenomenon, superhero comic books have emerged as a strong element of popular culture as their stories find their way into our bookstores, television, computers and movie houses, and have become more than just entertainment for children (Brown, 2018, pp.

[6] Neither *DavidPhilip* nor individual bookstores would make their sales figures of *Kwezi* available.

119-120). Pop culture has been identified as an ideological vehicle that organises reading and reception (Bennett, 1994, p. 223), which means that these comic books and their subsidiaries also potentially have an ideological effect. From this perspective, popular culture, and more specifically superhero comic books, can provide frames for the construction of gender identities and masculinity (Strinati, 1994, p. 438; Strinati, 1995, p. 172). The American superhero comic book industry favours particular types of representations of masculinity, gender, race and sexuality (Coogan, 2018, pp. 566-568), which are valuable because they are marketable, and the industry sets these up as the hegemonic represenation in the genre (Brown, 1999; Klein, 2007). These masculinities are exemplified by the most popular superheroes such as Superman, Batman, Iron Man and Captain America (Klein, 2007; Coogen, 2013) and are repackaged or rebranded into different superheroes throughout the genre.

Due to the economic and cultural constraints in the South African comic book industry, it is increasingly common for South African superhero comic books to adopt these American representations (Opperman, 2015, p. 76). Further, the focus on the American and Global North comic book audience has led to an ostracisation of black characters. This is for fear of losing the predominantly white audience (Opperman, 2015, p. 76). Both race and masculinity are intertwined in the process of representation and has been a subject of study in the world of academia. Hall (1997, pp. 272-274; Brown, 1999) describes this process by asserting that attempts to reclaim the black subject in popular culture tend to go through two phases. In the first phase blackness is liberated from negative representations and is replaced with more positive depictions. Thereafter, the black subject is reproduced inside contemporary regimes of representation. I am interested in analysing the character of Kwezi to see if Mzike's work follows Hall's description above, in his attempt to create a 'black South Africa superhero'. I will explore specifically whether Mkize rejects or reproduces the hegemonic construction of masculinity present in white, American superhero comic books. In order to achieve this, my study proposes an ideological analysis of this text, exploring the construction of masculinity in the South African superhero comic book.

A key aspect of this analysis is considering the prevailing masculinity and gender relations in South Africa. Gender theory and masculinity studies have recently been a realm of academic debate, spearheaded by Raewyn Connell and has been about the deconstruction of the current power structures in gender relations (Connell, 1985, p. 260). Applying Connell's concepts of

gender relations does require a sensitivity to the location in which it operates. For my research this social context is South Africa. The current state of gender relations in South Africa is influenced by multiple forces such as its social structures, cultures, economy, family and media, to name a few (Connell, 1985, pp. 264-269). One of the clear indicators of the state of gender relations in South Africa is reflected in the country's rape statistics, with *reported* rape cases per year ranging from 39 828 to 48 408 over the last decade – which amounts to about 116 per day (Africa Check, 2018; Morrell, 2001; Morrell, 2002). This terrifying statistic is indicative of a strong masculinist gender order in South Africa that exists as a structure, underpinning social practices and behaviours of women and men (Connell, 1987).

Masculinity cannot be analysed outside of its institutional context (Connell, 1993, p. 602), and as a cultural form, it cannot be delinked from sexuality (Connell, 1993, p. 602). It follows therefore, that masculinity is constructed within and maintained by the social context in which it exists, pursuing power on behalf of particular interests (Connell, 1993, p. 603). The culmination of masculinity pursuing power for a select few is hegemonic masculinity, which can be defined as a successful strategy of empowering male interests and subordinating women through subversion and subordination (Connell, 1993; Donaldson, 1993, pp. 645-646). For example, the discourse that genders the work space, that puts many women at a disadvantage, is not because the majority of women have decided it is right, but because they have been subordinated and made powerless in that space. While this is connected to male dominance, not all men practice it, which can similarly lead to the subordination of these men (Donaldson, 1993, pp. 645). It is thus not only women who can be subordinated by hegemonic masculinity, but other masculinities as well: more specifically those masculinities that do not embody the interests of hegemonic masculinity (Donaldson, 1993, pp. 646-647).

In South Africa, hegemonic masculinity is rooted in the colonial and apartheid oppression of people of colour (Wood & Jewkes, 2001; Morrell, 2002). For example, the Apartheid government made up of white, mostly Afrikaans-speaking men established an authoritative, unforgiving and unapologetic masculinity that was propagated in institutions such as schools, the media and universities (Morrell, 2001, p. 15). Further, the minority white population chose to subordinate and infantalise men of colour by using the word "boy" to describe working black males (Morrell, 2002, p. 322). This disempowering label was part of the systemic subordination of black masculinity throughout South Africa during Apartheid and is

so entrenched in the cultural mind of South Africans that it is still used today to refer to black men working as tradesmen and in occupations such as gardening (often referred to as "garden boys"). Although the post-1994 democratic South African constitution no longer discriminates according to race, the scars of the Apartheid hegemonic masculinity remain and have contributed to the rise of gender-based violence in the country, as well as the creation of a masculinist gender order (Morrell, 2001; Morrell, 2002; Wood & Jewkes, 2001).

The connection between the prevailing gender relations in South Africa, and how they relate to the gender regimes present in the genre of superhero comic books centres on the concept of hegemonic masculinity. In a post-apartheid South Africa it is difficult to identify the prevailing masculinity that asserts itself as hegemonic (Morrell, 2001; Morrell, 2002; Connell, 1993). While the legacy of white hegemonic masculinity that existed during Apartheid continues to have influence through different institutions such as the media, and has had a lasting effect on other masculinities in South Africa, it is not the only masculinity vying for power (Morrell, 2001, p. 23). Many previously oppositional masculinities such as black urban and rural masculinities are now competing for power in the discourse of masculinity. The interaction between these masculinities and the consequences of their rivalry are far reaching and are entrenched in much of our daily experiences (Connell, 1993; Morrell, 1998; Morrell, 2002). These masculinities draw on diverse political, organisational, and person-based imagery to gain power, a tactic used by many political parties before the 1994 democratic election (Morrell, 2001, p. 23; Connell, 1993). Any analysis of masculinity and hegemonic masculinity in South Africa must therefore not only take into consideration gender relations, but also how it is shaped by race and ethnicity (Morrell, 1998).

Within the South African context, masculinity needs to be understood in relation to both gender and race, as they are co-constituted by South Africa's colonial history (Morrell, 2002; Wood & Jewkes, 2001; Morrell, 1998, p. 605). However, this study will only investigate how masculinities are represented in *Kwezi*, keeping in mind the presences of race relations in the comic but not giving it specific focus. To understand how *Kwezi* locates itself within the conversation of hegemonic masculinity, I will use a combination of visual social semiotics, developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) and Thompson's theory of ideology (1990) and Propp, Todorov and Levi-Strauss' narrative theories.

For Cultural Studies, ideology is a site of struggle within which objects of culture, such as comic books, influence people's identities, desires and goals (Turner, 1990). Therefore, understanding how masculinity is represented and potentially shapes the readers' identities is important (Connell, 1985; Connell, 1993; Donaldson, 1993). Thompson's work on ideology is helpful because he is concerned with how "symbolic forms intersect with relations of power" (Thompson, 1990, p. 56), and how ideology is linked to the process of domination (Thompson, 1990). Whether the representations of Kwezi's masculinity are complicit with the hegemonic masculinity that dominates the genre depends on how it operates in relation to ideology, and creates meaning in the service of power (Janks, 1998, p. 198; Thompson, 1990). Understanding how ideology operates in the symbolic forms found within the pages of superhero comic books, will help me unpack the representations of masculinities within *Kwezi*.

To begin my analysis of *Kwezi* I will conduct an initial examination of issues 1-12, and identify key themes of masculinity in story arcs, sequences, and panels. I will then narrow down my selection for analysis to a specific story arc in the comic. My analysis of the selected story arc from *Kwezi* will be informed by three main approaches: narrative theory (Levi-Strauss, 1967; Propp, 1968; Todorov, 1981), visual social semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996), and Thompson's theory on the operation of ideology (1990), which aims to understand how ideology and power operate in and through language (Janks, 1998, p. 195; Hall, 1980; Purvis & Hunt, 1993).

Chapter outline

Chapter 2 will consist of a review of the literature concerning comic book theory, genre theory, narrative theory, masculinity theory and ideology theory to create a framework for making sense of *Kwezi*. In chapter 3 I will describe the methodology and methods I will use in my analysis, namely narrative theory, visual social semiotics and Thompson's concept of ideology. Chapters 4 and 5 contain my analysis in which I use narrative theory, visual social semiotics and Thompson's theory of operational ideology to analyse the selected story arc. In chapter 6 I discuss the findings of my analysis in the context of *Kwezi* as a whole, as well as the comic medium and the genre of superhero comics in South Africa.

Chapter two
Literature review/Theoretical framework

This chapter reviews the literature that explores various topics that will facilitate an ideological analysis of the constructions of masculinity in *Kwezi*. The review will cover comic book theory, genre theory, narrative theory, ideology theory and masculinity theory. I will present this review in two parts. First, I will cover the comic book theory that informs the construction of the comic itself as well as review the literature regarding superhero comic books. Second, I will cover genre, narrative, ideological and masculinity theory which will inform my content analysis of the comic as I investigate the construction of Kwezi's masculinity in the selected story arc. Although different, the literature under review is linked to my study and will enable a deeper understanding of the construction of the Kwezi's masculinity.

Comic Theory

Comic books have developed and changed as a medium since their origin and have cultivated a large market over the past hundred years. Although the brief history of American and South African superhero comic books provided is a good way to situate *Kwezi* in an historical context, it is more crucial to understand where it is located within the medium and genre, as well as the ideologies therein. Superhero comic book theory, which deals with the operation, construction and consumption of superhero comic books, is a recent and rapidly growing field within popular culture studies and has its own journals such as the *Journal of graphic novels and comics* and *The comics grid: journal of comic scholarship*. This relatively new body of knowledge examines comic books from various perspective, including feminism, the body, the gender order and race, as well as focussing on the form and aesthetics of comic books and the power dynamics between the writers, illustrators and editors (Dabeto & Oliveira, 2015; Grant, 2019; Friedlander, 2018). This growth of theory is largely because comic books are no longer thought of as quick diversions of entertainment, consumed by a small audience. Rather, they have become a multi-billion-dollar industry and have begun to deal with more relevant issues, evidenced in the recent slower consumption[7] of comic books

[7] The 'slower consumption' mentioned by Chutte (2017) refers to the desire of many writers and artists to create comics that are not just fun, diversionary magazines to flip through, but rather, as Spiegelman says, "require a bookmark" (Chute, 2017, p. 28). This refers to both the length of the actual comic as well as the

and their use in education, as autobiographies and even in journalism (Chute, 2017, pp. 28-29).

The American superhero comic book has, since its origin in the United States, grown and defined itself as a genre (Johnson, 2012; Robb, 2014). This is due to its growing popularity throughout the 20th century and into the 21st century, which has given rise to the two main players of the industry: Marvel Comics and DC. The rise in popularity of superhero comic books has caused it to develop as its own commercial form. The result of this has been the constant creation and recreation of superheroes throughout the decades in the United States and has culminated in the form and genre that we see today (Johnson, 2012; Růžička, 2010). Most of these superheroes and their iterations are a response to the socio-historical context in which they are created and influenced by their creators (Johnson, 2012; Robb, 2014). A large contributing factor to this is the people who write, draw, design and edit these superheroes as they draw on their own personal context and experiences to give life to these characters (Friedlander, 2018). The Superman of the 1930s was relatively brutal and was concerned with the problems of the ordinary man, whereas the Superman of the 21st century espouses a less down-to-earth approach and deals with large scale problems (Johnson, 2012; Robb, 2014). These differences have been identified and expanded upon in multiple books and papers[8], each plotting the rise and fall of the superhero comic book and its constant state of change. This literature points to a similar idea, that superhero comic books are a product of their socio-cultural context, and since the origin of superhero comic books is in the United States, it is their concept of a hero/superhero that dominates the genre in the 21st century.

Coogan (2013, p. 3) defines a superhero as:

> A heroic character with a universal, selfless, prosocial mission; who possesses superpowers – extraordinary abilities, advanced technology, or highly developed physical, mental, or mystical skills; who has a superhero identity embodied in a codename and iconic costume, which typically express their biography or character, powers, and origin (transformation from ordinary person to superhero); and who is genetically distinct, i.e. can be distinguished from characters of related genres

content being more in-depth and related to socio-cultural and political themes such as gender violence or racism.

[8] See (Johnson, 2012; Robb, 2014; Růžička, 2010; Maslon & Kantor, 2013; Nama, 2011; Beaty & Weiner, 2012)

> (fantasy, science fiction, detective, etc.) by a preponderance of generic conventions. Often superheroes have dual identities, the ordinary one of which is usually a closely guarded secret.

The male – and some female – superheroes found within American superhero comic books can look quite different but are mostly cut from this same cloth (I am speaking generally here and not dealing with the subcategory of the anti-hero). All of them are constructed around the idea of having a 'universal, selfless and prosocial' mission. This mission has its origins in the core of the American superhero genre: power and responsibility (Coogan, 2018, p. 569). But this power and responsibility must be contextually framed. Power over whom, and who defines what it means to be responsible? For the superhero comic book, it boils down to the social context and the values of the writers, illustrators, editors and their companies (Friedlander, 2018; Eisner, 2008).

Over time these conventions have resulted in American superhero comic books creating a pantheon of 'gods' to rival those of Greek, Egyptian and Hindu religions (Růžička, 2010). This American superhero mythology, through the economic prosperity of their home country, have come to dominate the global market – so much so that the names Superman, Batman, Captain American and Iron Man are synonymous with the superhero genre. Marvel, and to a lesser degree DC, have even expanded their market from print and online comic books to a multi-billion-dollar Hollywood blockbuster movie franchise. Over a ten-year period, Marvel has produced 24 movies grossing over 21.3 billion dollars at the global box office (Box Office Mojo, 2019). The global dominance both Marvel and DC have over the superhero comic book market, has allowed their representations of superheroes to become hegemonic. Big muscled men with powers beyond imagining battling alongside slim scantily clad superwomen with slightly fewer or less physically amazing powers, have become what defines the American, and by extension the global, representation of superheroes in comic books. These are the representations that have defined the genre for the 21st century.

Although the superhero comic book has developed almost exclusively in the United State, in the last few decades other countries have attempted to add their interpretation of the genre to the pantheon. Many African superheroes have been created in response to the rise of Western superheroes and their availability on the continent. However, they did not develop in a vacuum, but rather within the context of African popular culture. As a part of African popular

culture these superheroes become a creative form that reflected (and still reflects) everyday life for people of colour (Spencer, et al., 2018, p. 3). However, this representation is not so one dimensional and because they exist within a sphere of culture that is not adherent to academic restrictions or rules, it can be messy and contradictory (Spencer, et al., 2018, p. 4 & 8). Ogola (2017, pp. v) argues that African popular culture can create a type of order and provide "a window through which to witness change differently, to learn about alternative narrations and histories and to revise some of the problematic generic frames that characterise the reading of the African state". Furthermore, African popular culture can provide a space in which the marginalised can be heard, represented and interrogate their experience (Spencer, et al., 2018, pp. 3-5).

African popular culture truly began to develop from the innovations in text and print forms in the 1800 and 1900s. Early African writers and creatives used the form of writing to imagine new identities/personhoods, as well as relate and interrogate their social ways of being and how they related to the world (Barber, 2006, pp. 3-4). Writing became a way of relating and recording a person's being and way of life (Barber, 2006, p. 15). This was all done during a time when the African identity was strongly defined by colonialist and racist epistemologies.

The advent of writing and printing in Africa, while providing a space of reinvention and redefinition of the African identity, also created the opportunity for control of information. It gave license to writers to permanently inscribe separation by deciding what was legitimate and excluding what was deemed illegitimate (Barber, 2006, p. 19). This highlights the possible bias that can occur within a written text (which can be translated to any artefact of popular culture such as superhero comic books). While African popular culture can have a positive effect as described by Ogola (2017, p. v), it can also be a double-edged sword, used to exclude and subordinate as much as enlighten and liberate (Spencer, et al., 2018, p. 8). Therefore, the artefacts of African popular culture cannot be viewed as one-dimensional reflections of society. Rather when analysing or consuming them one must be careful to consider their genre conventions and aesthetic choices. (Hofmayer, 2004, p. 128).

Furthermore, African superheroes, falling under the umbrella of African popular culture, must be treated with the same critical lens as other artefacts of African popular culture, and not be reduced to simple readings or meanings. Coetzee (2016, p. 241), suggests that African superheroes can help us understand the evolving nature of African popular culture and lived

experiences, warning against the preconception that they are just a product of the infiltration of the West into youth culture in Africa. Ogola echoes this sentiment, stating that it would be foolish to simply categorise the African superhero as a Marvel (or Western) influenced product and that a deeper analysis will show an investment by authors in African tradition and a complex relationship with Western superheroes (Coetzee, 2016, p. 243).

An example of this simplistic categorisation would be the tradition versus modernity narrative often highlighted in African popular culture and African superheroes. Garuba (2003, pp. 261-270), states that this is a metanarrative born of an outsiders perspective on African popular culture and practices[9]. He continues to suggest that the relationship between tradition and modernity in African popular culture and superhero comic books can be seen as a re-enchantment of the world through the "animist unconscious"[10] (Garuba, 2003, pp. 261-265). There are many examples of the presence of this animist understanding of the world within African superheroes, for example James Yékú's *Akpos* and Frank Odoi's *Akokhan*. (Coetzee, 2016, p. 243). These African-centred superhero creations have the ability to give agency to subordinated Africans in the post-colonial era (Garuba, 2003, p. 285). Furthermore, Coetzee (2016, p. 242), suggests that African superheroes' powers can become elements of agency and creativity for the oppressed, redefining their sense of self as powerful, beautiful, intelligent and unique: the complete opposite to the colonial definition of the African identity. Therefore, it is helpful to understand that African superheroes do not exist in another fictional world unrelated and separate from ours. But rather that they live among us, existing in a complex relationship between past, present and future (Coetzee, 2016, p. 244).

While superheroes from western, eastern and northern Africa have been emerging and defining what it means to be an African superhero for the past few decades, Southern Africa has seen no such superbeings. *Kwezi* is among the first superheroes of Southern Africa and the first from South Africa to be commercially published and available to the general public in bookstores and comic book speciality stores

South Africa's superhero comic book market is in its infancy in comparison to that of its American counter-parts and is sharing much of the birthing pains of its predecessor (Mason

[9] While I do identify the modernity (or urban) versus tradition binary within *Kwezi* it is more to highlight their complex relationship than suggest that they are simply opposites within the South African masculine identity.
[10] This is grounded in the spirituality and religion of pre-colonial Africa (Garuba, 2003, pp. 261-265)

& Opperman, 2018). However, the context of the 21st century has created many more obstacles for the South African industry than were present for their older more successful cousins (Opperman, 2015). Not only do the South African writers and artists struggle to gain the attention of an audience in an ever-increasing market of entertainment, but they have to perform in the shadow of their American counterparts, who have not given much space for interpretation in the genre (Watson, 2018; Spiller, 2018; Smit, 2018). Superhero comic books like *Captain South Africa*, *Razor-man* (which is from Zimbabwe), *Siri Watu: Descendants Of Africa* (a style of African manga[11]), and *Kwezi* are at a disadvantage when measuring up to the mostly white, American superheroes that have had between a 25 – 100 years of circulation and audience build up (Wright, 2018; Smit, 2018). South African comic books struggle in this competitive, duopolistic market, and the South African new-comers must work within the constraints of the genre that has been set up as a cultural-commercial form. This has led the South African market to have two options. They must either mimic the dominant form of the superhero comic book, and be compared to their American counterparts, or, create a counter-cultural artefact that has to struggle against an already well-established industry and genre (Mason & Opperman, 2018; Smit, 2018).

Although the superhero comic book industry in South Africa is struggling, other genres of comics have made more headway. *Supastrikers*, a soccer themed comic book, was published in 2002 by Strika Entertainment. It is inserted into popular magazines like *Huisgenoot*, *You* and *Drum*, enabling sales of 720 000 copies through those weekly and monthly magazines (Roux, 2015). Strika Entertainment has gradually extended its franchise to encompass publication (now no longer inserts) in multiple countries around the world, an animated TV show and even a mobile game (Media Update, 2011). For *Supastrikas* the advantage was being placed as an insert in multiple magazines which allowed for it to reach multiple audiences. There was also no overwhelming opposition, no highly successful alternative to be compared to, and so it was able to carve out its own niche in the medium (Roux, 2015; Mason & Opperman, 2018). This success has been great, not only for South African comics in general, but also for the representation of African blackness in mainstream comics. However, it is not clear if these comic books fall prey to the hegemonic representation of masculinity. Black heroes created by black artists and writers are crucial because it enables the visibility of black men in comics, and South African comic book creators are aware of

[11] A Japanese form of comic book.

this (Watson, 2018; The Daily Vox, 2018). But for the last decade South African superhero comics have not been able to compete in the globalised market, and so have not been able to carve out their own pantheon and add their black African creations to the long list of superheroes (Dabeto & Oliveira, 2015; Wright, 2018).

Although blackness is not completely absent from superhero comic books, there is a clear hegemonic white racial order within the genre. The black experience in comic books is a diverse one, and so there have been many approaches to understanding the complex histories behind them (Miller, 2018, pp. 411-412). More than 60 years on from the introduction of *Black Panther*, black superheroes are still in the minority. Many of the flagship superheroes of Marvel and DC have remained white. There have been attempts by these companies to introduce black versions of the flagship characters, but whenever this is done, there is an outcry by the 'community' on social media. Miles Morales as Spider-Man and Riri Williams as Ironheart (a female version of Iron Man) are good examples of this.

American writers and illustrators have been struggling with the representation of blackness since the Civil Rights movement in the United States (Johnson, 2012). Characters like Black Panther, Storm and Luke Cage are just some of Marvel's and DC's attempts to address the absence of powerful black characters in their superhero comics (Nama, 2011). As most of these characters were created by white writers and editors, they have fallen short of the mark (Nama, 2011). For example, critics have highlighted the seldom subtle blaxploitation[12] of these superheroes in Marvel and DC's attempts to remain relevant during the Civil Rights movement (Jeffrey A, 2000; Nama, 2011). However, these superheroes were still used in positive ways. Luke Cage's character commented on the brutality of life as a black man in America. Wrongly convicted of a crime, Cage is thrust into the life of a superhero, "symbolising the triumphant transformation of a black underclass convict to a politicised black [superhero]" (Nama, 2011, pp. 53-55). Storm, the powerful Kenyan born superhero, part of the X-men, and the first black, female superhero, has an interesting story arc in which her blackness is redefined a couple of times (Dabeto & Oliveira, 2015). After the obligatory tragic backstory sets her up to be rescued by the leader of the X-men, Professor X, Storm is forced to 'civilise' herself and leave her culture behind after moving to America (Dabeto &

[12] Blaxploitation was a trend that began in the 1960s in which films exploited the relevance of blackness for profit, often trying to valorise the negative representations of blackness in America at the time or reinforcing racial stereotypes (Nama, 2011; Jeffrey A, 2000)

Oliveira, 2015, p. 3). But as her story progresses, she gets in touch with her heritage and this results not only in the growth of her character, but in the redesign of her body (Dabeto & Oliveira, 2015).

Along with the white racial order in superhero comics there is also a strong male gender order. This order has changed slightly over the life span of American superhero comics, but the gender order has not made any permanent shifts. Marvel and DC have tried to introduce female characters with varying success, depending mostly on their visual design (Brown, 2018, p. 120). The archetypal male superhero story was well established: "a boy separated from society in his growth to adolescence, initiated into the mysteries of manhood and returns able and willing to use his new-found strength and power to defend society" (Coogan, 2018, p. 569). However, the story of the superheroine focused more on collaboration, love and mentorship rather than that of strength and power, and any female hero that went against this norm was quickly put in her place (Coogan, 2018, pp. 570-571). Theorists have identified the hegemonic definition of femininity in superhero comics as something to be looked at, and never assertive so as not to violate the hierarchy created by the masculinity in superhero comic books (Brown, 1999). Wonder Woman is a good example of this. When she was first introduced as the Amazonian warrior princess, she was taller than Superman (Coogan, 2018, p. 573). This small yet ultimately significant detail was changed due to the hegemonic idea that a woman must be naturally smaller than a man because she is less powerful (Coogan, 2018, p. 613). This also occurred in the redesign of the female anti-hero Catwoman, where there was a clear agenda that while she needed to have new stronger looking design, she also had to be 'sexy' (Coogan, 2018, p. 614). Strides have been made by artists to counter this trope of female representation. Cameron Stewart's redesign of Batgirl as a less sexy, more practical superheroine is a good example of this, resulting from the presence of a female artists in the redesign process (Coogan, 2018, pp. 615-616).

The male gender order present in superhero comic books is based on a hegemonic masculinity that is established in relation to femininity, defining itself as non-feminine, often in extreme ways (Brown, 2018, p. 129). This is usually through the representation of the male body, constructed as strong, muscular and powerful, the opposite of the more petite, light and 'beautiful' bodies of the female superheroes (Brown, 2018, p. 123; De Dauw, 2018, pp. 67-68). The design of male superhero bodies has been a topic of debate for theorists and comic book creators. The creators often argue that these are *super*heroes and therefore must be the

prime specimens of the human body (some even claiming that character like Superman, being alien, cannot be part of this argument). However, as pointed out by Brown (1999) and Coogan (2018) these representations have clear implications for the construction of aspirational masculinities in society, especially for young men. The way these superheroes act also defines their masculinity. They are not only big, strong and powerful, but violent as well (Stevens, 2015, pp. 206-209). It is clear that the self-made man, who can determine his own destiny through hard work and will power, is the hegemonic ideology governing male superheroes actions (Stevens, 2015, p. 208).

The racial and gender order present in American superhero comic books has been clearly established over the course of the genre's life-time. *Kwezi* is significant in the South African superhero comic book industry because it is written by a black artist whose goal is to create a South African black superhero (The Daily Vox, 2018). However, challenging the tropes of the genre can be difficult and requires a deep understanding of the medium of comic books as well as the process by which they are created. This means unpacking the construction of the comic book from the ground up and analysing both the context within which the comic was created, as well as the people involved in its creation (Friedlander, 2018).

Comics, as they have developed from comic strips to pulp magazines to fully formed comic books, have developed multiple genres and narrative styles (Robb, 2014, pp. 31-33). These genres and narrative styles have shaped the development of the medium and created different types of reading involved in the medium of comic books. Comic books are a multi-modal form of literature, involving images, graphics and words. These require an understanding of visual, spatial and linguistic reading to understanding how to navigate comic books (Humphery, 2014, p. 2). This visual style depends on many factors like the genre and the artist, with each developing a visual or art style that is sometimes broken by the more experimental comic book artists. The most common form of artistic style for superhero comic books is a pseudo-realistic art style that make people, animals and objects easily recognisable to the reader. This visual style also often uses a realistic colour palette, with most superhero comic books coming in full colour. These are the norms in the genre of superhero comic books, however they have been experimented with by different artists, not only with colour, but also with the different elements used to construct comic books (Humphery, 2014).

These elements such as panels, pages, speech bubbles and sequences – to mention a few (see Appendix D for full definitions) not only affect the construction of the comic book, but also how it is read. The relationship between panels and pages for example, has been a topic of analysis for many theorists because it is an essential part of reading a comic book (del Rey Cabero, 2019, p. 2). Comics bring together two activities on one page, the act of seeing and reading. Theorists believe the most common form of reading these pages is linear and holistic reading (del Rey Cabero, 2019, p. 2). In this form of reading the viewer will normally perceive the images first, then complement it with the reading of the written text – unless the written text is printed in a large font or highlighted in some way (del Rey Cabero, 2019, p. 2). The reader is aware that they must then continue to another panel in order to progress in the reading of the comic. This temporality of reading a panel is obviously variable, and depends not only on the amount of text, or what is depicted in the image, but also on the location of the image on the page, and the culturally determined reading order – for example, middle eastern and eastern cultures read from right to left while Western cultures left to right (Fresnault-Deruelle, 1976; Hatfield, 2009, p. 139).

However, the viewer is not just bound to a linear reading of the comic book, reading each panel in order, the viewer can skip ahead, read out of order and disrupt the artist's intended order for reading (Cohn, et al., 2016, p. 568). This has not been lost on comic book artists who have redesigned and restructured the 'normal' form of the comic book to create other forms of reading such as multidirectional and multilinear reading. These forms of reading use the different elements of the comic like the page, panels and narrative, to suggest different directions of reading (Chute, 2012, p. 413). Some examples of this type of disruption are seen in Frank King and other authors, *Crazy Quilt, Chicago Tribune,* 3 May 1914 and Sergio García Sánchez (art) and Lewis Trondheim (script), *Les Trois Chemins*, 2000. Although comic book creators are experimenting with different forms of reading most commercial comic books, like superhero comic books, stay within the linear, holistic way of reading.

Will Eisner describes comics as "sequential art" (Eisner, 1985). Placing images in a sequence of two or more cause these images to transform into something more than just pictures: they become the "art of comics" (McCloud, 2006, p. 8). McCloud goes further, describing comics as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (McCloud, 1993, p. 9). Therefore the panel, in which these images are often contained, becomes a building block of

the narrative of the comic book. Panels can be defined as the individual images or contained illustrations that make up the pages of comic books (Eisner, 1985; McCloud, 2006; Eisner, 2008). The panels of a comic book are placed in a specific order to create an intended message/story for the reader. McCloud (2006, pp. 10-11) breaks the components of a comic book down into five sections; choice of moment, frame, image, word and flow (McCloud, 2006, pp. 10-37). These five choices, made by the creators of the comic book, form the construction of the comic book and are the container in which the narrative is carried.

The first choice is that of the **moment**. This refers to how the comic book creators decide on what moments are crucial for understanding the current scene they are working on. This process includes deciding what panels will make up the comic book page, and balancing either minimising panel count for efficiency or designing more panels to create emphasis (McCloud, 2006, pp. 12-13). They do this by focusing on five types of transitions that can make up these moments: (1) Action to action, (2) Subject to subject, (3) Moment to moment, (4) Aspect to aspect and (5) The non sequitur (McCloud, 2006, pp. 14-15). Closely associated with the choice of moment is that of **frame**. This refers to how each panel is designed to create a sense of "place, position and purpose", showing the reader what they need to see (McCloud, 2006, p. 16). In filmmaking terms, this would be like deciding on the camera angle for each panel. This allows the creators to decide how to direct the readers' focus and affects the storytelling process by revealing or withholding information.

Another aspect of the construction of comics McCloud (2006) highlights is the choice of **imaging**. This process allows the comic creators to decide how to evoke the appearance of different parts of the story such as characters, objects, symbols and environments (McCloud, 2006, pp. 26-29). To do this the creators take into consideration aspects like resemblance, specificity, expression, body language and the natural world to most effectively tell the story (McCloud, 2006, pp. 28-29). Next comic creators must consider the choice of **word**. This concerns the language of the comic and linguistic devices used to communicate impactful ideas and create synergy between the sounds, voices and images of the comic (McCloud, 2006, pp. 30-31; Eisner, 1985). This requires the use of speech and thought balloons, as well as onomatopoeia. These elements need to be integrated into the images (the previously mentioned process) to create range, specificity, evoke the human voice and other senses, as well as to convey abstract concepts. The choices of imaging and word often complement each other and must be combined well by creators to make an effective vehicle for the narrative.

Lastly, according to McCloud (2006), the comic creators consider **flow**. This has to do with the arrangement of the panels on the page and then the arrangement of the elements (those previously listed) within those panels. This choice is designed to help the reader navigate the panels and pages comfortably and create an intuitive reading experience (McCloud, 2006, pp. 32-33).

These five choices create clarity in the comic so that the reader can easily comprehend the goals of the comic's creators. However, they are not ordered steps: most often comic book creators deal with two or more of these choices at the same time (McCloud, 1993; McCloud, 2006; Eisner, 2008). Choices of moment, frame, and flow are usually present in the planning process of the comic, while choices of word and image come toward the end of the process. But each group of comic book creators has their own process: what makes a successful comic book is the consideration of these choices throughout all stages of the comic book's creation (Eisner, 2008; McCloud, 2006).

Besides the five choices mentioned above, another key element involved in the creation of a comic book is the design of the characters and their bodies (Eisner, 2008; McCloud, 1993; Chute, 2017). A unique part of comic book design is understanding the limited space for story telling in the medium (Eisner, 2008, p. 20). Comics are different from novels and film in that they are designed to present a narrative through short punchy words *and* images, but are not afforded the page length of a novel or many frames of a film (Eisner, 2008; McCloud, 1993). Eisner (1985; 2008) claims that this issue is resolved through the use of stereotypes, as they communicate who or what the character is without having to waste space on a complicated backstory. The caricature must settle the matter instantly because there is no time in the comic to develop character. However, this does create some issues. Since the caricature must resonate with the reader and be easily identifiable, the artist must create something that can communicate across cultures, so that no reader is left in the dark (Eisner, 2008, p. 22). This is a difficult task and can inevitably lead to what Hall describes as dissident readings (Hall, 1997).

It follows then that comics themselves can hold any number of ideas or images depending on the creators and their different tastes, cultural experiences, and personal values (McCloud, 1993, p. 6). What I am concerned with is the construction of Kwezi's masculinity. To unpack

the constructions of masculinity within *Kwezi*, I will analyse the superhero comic using both narrative and genre theory, as well as ideology and masculinity theory.

Genre, Narrative, Ideology and Masculinity theory

Genre is an abstract concept derived from the French word meaning kind or class (Chandler, 1997, p. 1). It is used to inform the audience or reader about what to expect from the text (Chandler, 1997; Martin & Rose, 2008). In this instance *Kwezi* is an example of a superhero comic book (genre) within the medium of comic books. Genre not only informs the reader what to expect, but it also creates frameworks within which texts are produced and interpreted (Chandler, 1997, p. 5). This creates an interesting connection between the genre and the text, as the text must restrict itself to a shape that fits the genre framework and marshals the reader to interpret the text in a specific way (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010, p. 24). This does require the reader to have prior knowledge or cultural knowledge of the framework of the genre to interpret the content, which is why genre, as Todorov put it, can be culturally specific and ideologically specific (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010, p. 24). This creates a connection between the producer, the culture and the expectations of the audience that results in any new creations within the genre being compared to previous instances of similar work (Chandler, 1997, p. 5; Smart, 1993).

Understanding this connection is critical within the socio-cultural environment of *Kwezi*, because the consequences of the intertextual conversation within the genre of superhero comic books results in a comparison made within a certain ideological context (Chandler, 1997; Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010). Furthermore, as *Kwezi* exists within the superhero comic genre, the framework of the genre will determine how it is constructed (Chandler, 1997; Threadgold, 1989). Chandler (1997, p. 9) states that knowing the genre rules and seeing them play out can bring pleasure to an audience. This makes sense because if one paid to see a sci-fi action movie and got a romantic comedy instead, it would probably cause irritation. But there is an issue with this process. If the current genre rules are broken, outdated, or exclusive, then any attempt to break those rules could lead to exclusion from the genre or rejection from the audience (Chandler, 1997; Threadgold, 1989). Understanding the crucial aspects of the genre, in this case the superhero comic book, is important for unpacking the genre framework and how *Kwezi* attempts to break, or maintain, them. Since the

superhero/heroine is the determining factor for this genre of comic books, I will use narrative theory to analyse the narrative and the characters within.

The superhero, who is usually the protagonist of the story in a superhero comic book, is one of the crucial components that define this genre and so understanding the construction of these superheroes in relation to the narrative assists in unpacking the prevailing structures with in the genre. Narrative is everywhere and pervades every part of our life, not just in our entertainment but even our conversations and work. Whether it is complex or simple, we are exposed to narrative from an early age, and making sense of narrative has been a complex problem for theorists as far back as Aristotle (Berger, 1997, p. 2). Narrative theory concerns itself with narrative as a sense-making structure that hinges on a disruption (Prinsloo, 2009, p. 231). Narrative theory also identifies the choices made by the author in the creation and organising of the text (Prinsloo, 2009, p. 215). Three significant theorists – Tzvetan Todorov, Vladimir Propp and Claude Lévi-Strauss (Levi-Strauss, 1967; Propp, 1968; Todorov, 1981) – have made a significant contribution to the development of narrative theory, which I explore briefly below.

Todorov saw narrative as a causal transformation and broke this transformation down into five stages, each constituting a point in the narrative (Todorov, 1981). The first is a state of equilibrium, a time of harmony and order in the story. This is usually changed early in the narrative through a disruption of the equilibrium caused by an action made by one or more of the characters. Stages three and four of the narrative involve the recognition of the disruption and actions to restore the equilibrium, respectively. The narrative concludes with stage five, the restoration of a new, altered state of equilibrium different from the first (Prinsloo, 2009). Todorov's model is not only useful for understanding how a particular narrative is structured, but also for asking questions like what counts as an initial equilibrium and disruption (Prinsloo, 2009, pp. 217-219)? Identifying what is considered the equilibrium, the disruption and who he hero is, allows us to identify the positioning of the text in relation to the culture, and what or who was omitted (Prinsloo, 2009, p. 221; Todorov, 1981).

Propp developed a detailed model with which to analyse narrative, concerning himself more with the content of the narrative than its structure. After analysing 100 Russian folktales he came up with 31 narrative functions divided into six stages: preparation, complication, transference, struggle, return and recognition (Propp, 1968). From this vast number of

narrative functions, he drew four conclusions about narrative. First, characters' actions are the components of the tale, not who the characters are or what they look like. Second, the number of functions of a folktale is limited. Third, the sequence of events is always identical, meaning that certain functions occur in the same stage of the narrative. Some events can happen at the same time, and Propp allows for the omission of functions and some narratives having more than one development. And lastly, all fairy tales are of one type of structure. This takes into consideration the cultural context of the fairy tale, and yet still seems to fit many other myths and cultures (Berger, 1997, pp. 23-30).

Levi-Strauss' model takes a decidedly different approach to that of Todorov and Propp, by focussing more on the ideological meaning of the events that take place within a narrative, rather than the structure of the narrative or the event itself (Prinsloo, 2009, p. 236; Levi-Strauss, 1967). Levi-Strauss' initial concern was with identifying a deep structure of meaning in narratives within a binary opposition (Levi-Strauss, 1967; Berger, 1997, p. 29). This allowed theorists to begin to analyse narratives as engaging with meaning-making, which is historically and culturally located (Prinsloo, 2009, p. 237). These binary oppositions in narrative operate through classification and evaluation (Levi-Strauss, 1967). While initially a character might be classified as white or black, it does not stop there as these classifications go on to be weighed as superior or inferior. By identifying the binary oppositions within a narrative, the value of a person, event or moral can be identified and the prevailing discourse can be revealed (Prinsloo, 2009, p. 238; Berger, 1997, p. 29).

Although these theorists were mostly considering folktales and myths, their theories can be applied to comics and the genre of superhero comic books. Thomas Inge (1990) defines comics as, "an open-ended dramatic *narrative* about a recurring set of characters, told in a series of drawings, often including dialogue in balloons and a *narrative* text, and published serially in newspapers"[13]. The emphasis on narrative twice in this definition is a good indication that it is an important aspect of a comic (Berger, 1997). This is why I have decided to use elements of Propp, Todorov and Levi-Strauss in my analysis. I will use Todorov to identify the equilibriums and disruptions to the narrative, Propp to analyse the relationship between the characters and their place in the narrative, and Levi-Strauss to identify the favoured binaries constructed in the text.

[13] Emphasis is my own.

The way a comic book presents its narrative, through sequential panels in a specific order on a page, requires the reader to link the panels together, unifying them to make a coherent story (Berger, 1997, p. 101; Eisner, 1985). This is like when a person goes to see a film and the images are projected at high speed to give the illusion of action (Berger, 1997). But just as a person seeing a film needs to have prior knowledge on how to interpret it, such as genre, experiencing the narrative in a comic book requires prior knowledge as well (Berger, 1997, p. 12). When a reader comes to a comic book, they need to understand the different elements a comic book illustrator would use to illustrate something like movement. For example, wobbly lines around a man crouching down could indicate he was shaking, or that he is cold or afraid. In a film the viewer would see the character shiver in real-time and be able to make deductions about the condition of the character from that and his environment. Another example is speech bubble design. A comic book writer might indicate that a character is whispering by making the text in the speech bubble small, as an indication of volume. Just as knowledge of genre prepares the audience to experience a film, the reader of a comic book needs to understand how to interpret the narrative of a comic (McCloud, 1993; Berger, 1997). This type of media, specifically comic books, is described as 'cool media' because it does not provide an overwhelming amount of information and so requires more participation from the reader for interpretation of the narrative (Berger, 1997, p. 104). As readers gain experience with decoding the narrative of the comic book, they also become familiar with the characters of the genre (Berger, 1997, p. 102). This familiarity makes comics an iterative art form, meaning that as the reader continues to experience the narrative centred on certain characters, for example Batman or Superman, there is an accumulated pleasure in following the superheroes' adventures (Berger, 1997).

This pleasure has created a fan base that is loyal, passionate, and invested in the stories of their superheroes, going as far as to dress up like them at comic book conferences and even getting into heated arguments over which superhero is best (Smit, 2018; Spiller, 2018). Considering the far reaching effects of comic books and the potential 'power' that these characters have over the audience, there is a need to understand the different roles this type of media might play in our cultural context (Prinsloo, 2009, p. 205), and how this 'symbolic form intersects with relations of power' (Thompson, 1990). Thompson's understanding of ideology is useful to interrogate the intersection of masculinity and power in superhero comic

books, because it allows for an analysis that takes the negative sense of ideology[14] into consideration. Thompson does not confine his concept of ideology to just unequal class relations, but also includes race and gender (Janks, 1998, pp. 197-198). However, Thompson does not consider subordinate contestation of dominant ideologies, and so sees ideologies like feminism outside of ideology, because it counters domination (Prinsloo, 2009, pp. 206-208; Janks, 1998).

My study concerns how the hero of the comic is constituted in and through certain ideologies of masculinity. This is evidenced in how the characters themselves engage and express their conflicts within competing ideologies, such as feminism and patriarchy, or blackness and masculinity (Stevens, 2015, pp. 16-18). This requires an understanding of ideology theory (and Althusser's concept of interpellation[15]). According to Hall (1983), Althusser opened the way for a more linguistic approach to the concept of ideology and highlighted the often-overlooked issue of how ideology becomes internalised and normalised in a subject. I will conduct an ideological analysis using Thompson's modes of operational ideology (legitimation, dissimulation, unification, fragmentation and reification) to analyse how the linguistic and non-linguistic symbols in the text create ideological effects (Janks, 1998, p. 198). I will go into more detail with this method in the methodology chapter later.

The key ideological issue I will focus on is the construction of Kwezi's masculinity. As a form of ideology, masculinity is a particular form of social power and I am concerned with how this power is used within *Kwezi*, and whether it supports a certain kind of representation of masculinity.

As a young South African producer, Mkize operates within the South African gender order. The current state of the gender order in South Africa is in part reflected in the country's rape statistics, which, as stated in chapter one, is at a record high (Africa Check, 2018; Morrell, 2001; Morrell, 2002). These statistics indicate that there is a powerful masculinist gender order in South Africa that is both violent and oppressive towards any who do not adhere to it (Morrell, 2002, pp. 309-311; Morrell, 2001). This gender order has everything to do with

[14] The negative sense of ideology is focussed on the unequal power relations in society and the absence of social justice.

[15] Interpellation is an Althusserian term for the process in which people are constituted as subjects through the process of hailing (Purvis & Hunt, 1993).

power and it includes masculinity and representations of the body (Connell, 1993). As such it pervades every part of our lives including advertising, entertainment and literature, finding a strong position within popular culture that has not really changed over the last 100 years (Connell, 1993). Connell (1987) theorised that gender power operates within three spheres: labour, power (which can be identified as actions that oppress women) and cathexis (the psycho-social structures of sexuality). These are practised within the gender regimes of family, state and street (Connell, 1987). It is within this gender order that masculinity is located (Connell, 1985, p. 261). Masculinity as a personal practice cannot therefore be analysed outside of its institutional context (Connell, 1993, p. 602), and as a cultural form, it cannot be delinked from sexuality (Connell, 1993, p. 602).

It follows, therefore, that masculinity is constructed within, and maintained by, the social context in which it exists, pursuing power on behalf of particular interests (Connell, 1993, p. 603). These interests are in favour of men which is why the study of masculinity is a study of men's places and practices within gender relations or the contextual gender order (Connell, 1993, p. 601). After many years dedicated to sex-role theory, Connell contributed to a major shift in gender studies, replacing sex-role theory and providing a different understanding of masculinity that takes historical context and development into consideration (Morrell, 1998, pp. 606-607). This assists in understanding how masculinity is constructed in the text by understanding its place within the context is created and by whom it is created.

Research into gender studies and masculinity demonstrates that there is not one universal masculinity that works to oppress women, but rather many masculinities at different levels of power (Morrell, 1998, p. 607). Connell argues that there are four catagories of masculinity that can be used to make sense of the relationships between groups of men: dominant, complicit, submissive and oppositional (Morrell, 1998, p. 607). Connell notes that as these groups are fluid it is difficult to pin down 'membership' to a particular group, stating that research should rather be focused on the use of power within masculinity and how it operates in our society (Morrell, 1998, p. 608; Connell, 1993). If the focus is on power structure and effects through masculinity, then it is easier to identify those men that can become victims of gender domination and masculinity, because they are constructed as a different kind of masculinity than the currently prevailing hegemonic one (Morrell, 1998, pp. 607-608; Donaldson, 1993). However, Connell and Morrell both agree that while some masculinities may be oppressed, all men for most of their lives will have enjoyed the patriarchal dividend,

and so cannot be comparable to women in their oppression by the partiarchal and masculinist gender order (Morrell, 1998, pp. 608-610; Connell, 1993). Connell theorises the importance of acknowledging the link between patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity. This is not rule by majority, but rather rule by pursuasion of the greater population, through media, social intitutions etc, to follow a certain ideal as normal: it is about cultural domination (Donaldson, 1993, pp. 645-646; Morrell, 1998, p. 609; Connell, 1993).

Connell (1993, p. 600) summarises the effect of hegemonic masculinity within patriarchy quite succinctly as "embodying a successful strategy for the subordination of women". However, as previously stated, it is not only women who can be oppressed by hegemonic masculinity, other men can also be subordinated if they do not conform to the hegemonic way of living out masculinity (Donaldson, 1993, p. 646). Hegemonic masculinity is perpetuated in many ways, one of which is particuarly relevant to this study. It is naturalised through the form of the hero, through songs, ballads, movies, novels and comic books (Donaldson, 1993, p. 650). This naturalisation is alientating for those who do not fit in. Donaldson (1993) argues that if there are independent structures of masculinity, then it stands to reason that hegemonic masculinity should produce counter-masculinities that are outside the norm (Donaldson, 1993). These counter masculinities can fall into three of Connells' four catagories: complicit, submissive or oppositional. If complicit or submissive these masculinities contribute to the ruling gender order despite being oppressed by it while the oppositional operates against the ruling ideas of hegemony (Connell, 1993; Donaldson, 1993). It is important to acknowledge the existence of these subordinate masculinities because they can often make up the majority of men under the hegemonic masculinist system, depending on the cultural context (Morrell, 2002). While hegemonic masculinity usually operates without violence to remain in power, there are violent consequences to its propagation in society, as seen in the South African masculinist gender order (Morrell, 1998).

To understand the current state of the gender order in South Africa we need to consider the history of the country, both under colonialism and Apartheid. After hundreds of years of oppression, colonialism had taken the existing pre-colonial masculinities and subordinated them (Morrell, 1998, p. 605). In South Africa, hegemonic masculinity is rooted in the colonial and Apartheid oppression of people of colour (Wood & Jewkes, 2001; Morrell, 2002). For example, the Apartheid government, made up of white, mostly Afrikaans speaking men established an authoritave, unforgiving and unapologetic masculinity that was

propagated in different institutions such as schools and in the media (Morrell, 2001, p. 15). This was a white masculinity for white men, and not meant for men of colour. This further racialised masculinity, so one cannot understand masculinity in South Africa without an understadning of its political, racial order.

The connection between masculinity, the gender order and the racialised colonial order in South Africa is strong, and is arguably the basis for the construction of many forms of masculinity (Morrell, 1998, pp. 605-607). Beyond the exclusive white masculinity, coloniality has produced other masculinities that subordinate black, coloured, Indian and Asian men. This all stems from the "global racial/ethnic hierarchy that privilages European people over non-European people" and the "global gender hierarchy of males over females and European Judeo-Christian patriarchy over other forms of gender relations" (Quijano, 1993, p. 170; Grosfoguel, 2007). An example of this was during Apartheid when people of colour were removed from the cities. This prevented their agency while also creating an exclusive capitalist space for the white masculinity. This act of subordination, along with many other factors such as pre-colonial indigenious gender regimes, poverty and culture created many subsets of black masculinities such as the traditional or gangster/tsotsi masculinities (Morrell, 1998, p. 623 & 627). This deeply embedded and historically constructed connection between race and gender in South Africa forms the foundation for the construction of black masculinity in popular culture and media.

While there is a definite continued subordination of black masculinity in the post-Apartheid South Africa (Morrell, 2007; Morrell, 2002), it would be simplistic to state that South Africa was under one form of patriarchy. There is a patchwork of masculinities within the South African patriarchal order vying for power. Black masculinity itself has been split into competing groups, such as young vs old, or new urban vs traditional or rural masculinities (Morrell, 1998; Morrell, 2002). These masculinities conflict with each other while still suffering from the fallout of Apartheid, which subordinated them in varying ways. (Morrell, 2001; Wood & Jewkes, 2001). The consequences of colonialism continuing through the oppression of South African men has resulted in a confused and violent group of masculinities that leave many South African men broken, depressed and subordinated, while further oppressing women (Morrell, 1998, pp. 319-321). Under the current gender order in the post-apartheid South Africa, where South African men have lost their jobs and their dignity, many have chosen to express their feelings of emasculation in violent and oppressive

ways (Wood & Jewkes, 2001; Morrell, 1998). Although the post-1994 democratic constitution outlaws all forms of discrimination, the scars of apartheid hegemonic masculinity remain and have contributed to the rise of gender-based violence in the country, as well as the creation of the masculinist gender order that exists today (Morrell, 2001; Morrell, 2002; Wood & Jewkes, 2001).

While the relationship between modernity and tradition in African popular culture is complex and changing, one of its consequences is the construction of black masculinities in urban spaces. These constructions of African masculinities are created within their specific historical and contemporary contexts, and all attempts to create a future for Africa through creative artefacts like comic books will contain reference to this journey from the historical past to the present (Peterson, 2003, p. 197). However, the presence of a colonial past is not the only history present in African popular culture and superhero comic books. For example, Frank Odoi's *Akokhan* uses African folklore (mostly Kenyan) and fits into the template of a Marvel comic, using the tropes, methods and forms of the western superhero comic book while giving his comics a distinct African focus (Omanga, 2016, pp. 262-265). This repurposes a Western medium into something that celebrates and resonates with African histories, while also acknowledging the post-colonial context. *Kwezi* fits well within this model as Western superhero comics and South African folklore help Mkize construct the narrative for the world and characters he is creating in the pages of *Kwezi* (Smit, 2018).

There is a desire among young black people to create their own narratives within the harsh urban landscape in which they live and to humanise their experience in the post-apartheid and post-colonial context (Peterson, 2003, p. 197). African popular culture provides a space in which to create new forms that allow this and have resulted in the attempted repossession of the black identity and for example, the redefinition of the black male body (Spencer, et al., 2018, p. 8). As with African popular culture itself, these new forms of representation walk a line between rejection of current representations, inventions of new ones and syncretism. This is present in African superhero comic books in the specific and hegemonic representation of the male body. Male African superheroes are often drawn in ways that reproduce the Western representation of the male superhero body. However, there are attempt by comic book artists like Odoi and others to redefine the black male body (Ogola, 2017). Furthermore, much like *Akokhan*, there can be a balance that allows comic book superhero to translate more than just

its cultural context and indeed become a touchstone for an entire continent (Omanga, 2016, pp. 262-274).

This chapter has focused on reviewing the literature that provides a context for my analyse the South African comic book, *Kwezi*. I have discussed the literature dealing with comic books that will provide a framework for the analysis of the comic book as a medium. Secondly, I covered genre, narrative, ideological and masculinity theory which will assist in analysing the content of the superhero comic book, with emphasis on the construction of Kwezi's masculinity in the comic book and whether Mkize reproduces the hegemonic representations of masculinity within the genre. In the following chapter I will review the literature that informs my research methodology and how I will conduct my analysis of *Kwezi* considering the constructions of blackness and masculinity in the selected story arc.

Chapter three
Methodology and Method

This chapter focuses on the methodology and methods used to analyse the selected story arc of the superhero comic book, *Kwezi*. Firstly, I discuss qualitative methodology and my rationale for its use. This is followed by a discussion of the three methodologies I will be using to conduct the multi-modal analysis of *Kwezi's* selected story arc: visual social semiotics, Thompson's modes of operational ideology and narrative theory. I will use visual social semiotics to describe the visual elements of the panels, and Thompson's modes of operational ideology to analyse the ideological meanings in the written text, as well as the images where appropriate (Thompson, 1990; Hall, 2012). I will also analyse the narrative of the story arc in relation to the identified constructions of masculinity using narrative theory. Finally, I will discuss my research sample and rationale for the selection. Thompson's critical theory of ideology will be useful because it is, "concerned with the ways in which meaning is mobilised in the social world and serves thereby to bolster up individuals or groups who occupy positions of power" (Thompson, 1990, p. 56). This process of analysing the comic book through a multi-modal analysis is necessary because comic books create meaning through the images and written text in each panel working in conjunction with one another (Eisner, 1985; McCloud, 1993). By using multi-modal analysis to investigate the selected story arc I will be able analyse the panels individually, as well as in sequence. This allows me to consider the different possible representations relating to constructions of masculinity in the comic book.

Methodology

Qualitative research is a methodology that developed out of the criticisms of positivism and quantitative methodology (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Quantitative methodology focuses on scientific research and the natural world, while qualitative research looks back to theory and compares how the research relates to it (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, pp. 28-29). Qualitative methodology states that the social world is not the same as the natural world and that the social structures that exist both affect and are affected by the social actors that exist in them (Deacon, et al., 1999; Babbie & Mouton, 2001, pp. 28-30). The differences between these methodologies lie with their philosophies. Quantitative methodology is based on positivism, whereas qualitative methodology on interpretivism. For the interpretivist the, "central

concern is not with establishing relations between cause and effect but with exploring the ways that people make sense of their social world and how they express that understanding through language, sound, imagery, personal style and social rituals" (Deacon, et al., 1999, p. 6). Interpretivists believe that the structures of social and cultural life change and are reproduced through the interactions of people in everyday life (Deacon, et al., 1999, p. 7). Therefore, qualitative methodology focusses on cultural processes, and understanding how social actors navigate the social structures they inhabit.

Therefore, interpretivists apply qualitative research to the contexts of meaning-making in society. The two main areas in which this is applied regards people's lived situations or for the study of meaning-making in text. When looking at people's lived experiences, qualitative research applies ethnographic approaches to the study. They begin with immersion into the social context, which allows them to create thick, in-depth descriptions of the events during the research. They then build a hypothesis and theory to make sense of their observations, speaking back to already existing theory (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p. 273). This however is not relevant to my study as mine is a textual study. The qualitative methods used here are based on research into the construction of meaning in texts. Many quantitative researchers have questioned the generalisability of these studies, calling into question their relevance. In response to this, qualitative researchers have developed a different conceptualisation of validity and reliability (Seale, 1999, p. 1).

According to Babbie and Mouton (2001, pp. 276-278), qualitative methodology developed its own criteria for 'objectivity' in contrast to those of the Natural Sciences. The criteria that are relevant to my study are transferability and confirmability. Transferability refers to the extent that the findings can be applied to other respondents or contexts (Leung, 2015, p. 1). This will be dealt with through thematic analysis as well as how I will relate the analysis of the selected story arc to the rest of the comic using narrative theory. Confirmability refers to the degree to which the findings are not affected by the biases of the researcher (Leung, 2015, p. 2). I adhere to this criterion by first doing a thematic analysis of the entire comic, which allows me to identify all the possible themes of masculinity present in the comic. Then I can select my sample based on the evidence presented by the thematic analysis and prevent bias, as well as prevent selecting samples with duplicate themes.

To summarise, qualitative methodology takes an in-depth look at social science research focusing on understanding and meaning, over description. It answers more focused questions and concerns itself with the insider perspective of the research subjects. Qualitative methodology is concerned with the why of the research question. In relation to my work, qualitative methodology will allow me to analyse the construction of masculinity within the text, taking into consideration its social context. I will now go on to present the visual social semiotic method, then I will go on to explain Thompson's modes of operational ideology and finally narrative theory.

Methods of analysis

Visual social semiotics

In semiotic theory you are asking two questions of an image: what does it denote – who and/or what is depicted, and what does it connote – what values, ideas and structures are communicated through what is represented and how it is represented (Machin & Mayr, 2012, pp. 49-50; Barthes, 1973)? According to van Leeuwen (2000) it is valuable to look at images for the way that individual elements and features can communicate implicit or indirect meanings to the reader and that these observations can be applied to both written texts and images. This methodology is useful for my analysis because comic books communicate meaning via written texts and images (Harrison, 2003, p. 46; McCloud, 2006; Eisner, 2008).

Three main schools have theorised semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, pp. 2-5). The first was the Prague school in the 1930s and 40s that developed an understanding of semiotics through linguistics. Second was the Paris school during the 1960s and 70s which applied the ideas of de Saussure and other linguists to multiple facets of communications like photography, music, painting and fashion. The third school is visual social semiotics, which I will draw on to conduct my analysis. Visual social semiotics was developed from two schools of thought founded on the work of Michael Halliday. First was a school of critical linguists seeking to create a theory that would encompass other semiotic modes, and second, a development of systemic-functional linguistics of literature, visual social semiotics and music (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Halliday's semiotic theory seeks to understand how a communication system, such as an advertisement, poster or comic strip, operates by fulfilling three meta-functions: the **ideational**, the **interpersonal** and the **textual** (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). The **ideational function** is concerned with the

constructions or representations of experiences or perceptions of the world. The **interpersonal function** considers the ways in which language facilitates a relationship between the text and the reader. Finally, the **textual function** considers the interaction between all the components in the image such as representations and interactions (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001, p. 140; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 228).

Visual social semiotics has taken these three meta-functions and extended them to produce a theoretical framework for investigating images (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 15 & 41). The augmented meta-functions are as follows: the **representational meaning** (which considers the people, places and objects or participants within an image); the **interactive meaning** (which involves the relationships between the participants within the image as well as with the viewer); and the **compositional meaning** (which considers how meaning is conveyed through the layout of the image and combination of the first two metafunctions) (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Harrison, 2003, pp. 50-55). These metafunctions all operate within an image simultaneously to create meaning using semiotic resources (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Semiotic resources are defined as the objects, actions or artefacts that are in operation in the process of communication (van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 3). They are the means by which the reader will make sense of the image and decipher/create meaning (van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 4). Although meanings attached to semiotic resources are not fixed, and the link between the processes of encoding and decoding are tenuous (Hall, 1980, p. 125), there are limitations on meaning-making due to the hegemonic nature of society and culture. Therefore, there is value in identifying the possible meanings in written texts and images to uncover the interests or functions that have been prioritised (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, pp. 46-47; Jewitt & Oyama, 2001, p. 136). Visual social semiotics seeks to do this by unpacking the different semiotic resources at work within each of its defined meta-functions.

The **representational meta-function** or meaning operates through the relationship between the participants in the image and the way they are depicted (Harrison, 2003, pp. 50-51; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Two types of participants are involved in a semiotic act: the interactive participants (the act of communication), and the represented participants (the subject matter of the communication) (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 48). These are basic descriptions and they can overlap, be overt or covert versions of both. The semiotic modes at

work within this meta-function are the narrative representations and conceptual representations.

Narrative representations present unfolding actions or change with an image and are characterised by the presence of action or reactional vectors in the image (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Harrison, 2003). Action vectors are usually created by body parts or tools, and reactional vectors through the participant's eyeline (Harrison, 2003, p. 51). Conceptual representation does not include vectors, but rather represent the participants in terms of their generalised status or concept: for example, by gender, class, sex or race (Harrison, 2003, p. 51; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, pp. 59-60). These participants are connected to each other through similarity relations – such as certain characteristics or components (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, pp. 79-80; Jewitt & Oyama, 2001, p. 141). Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) analyse the conceptual representation through two processes: the analytical processes and the symbolic processes. The analytical process breaks down the participants into the carrier, and the carrier's possessive attributes. The carrier is defined as the whole part of the image. The possessive attributes are defined as the parts of the image that often make up the carrier (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 87). An analytical picture has no vector, it just serves the function of carrier, allowing the reader to inspect the carrier's possessive attributes. A good example of this would be an image from a fashion magazine that shows a completed outfit broken down into its different parts, allowing the reader to analyse the whole as well as its separate parts (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, pp. 87-89). In the symbolic process the image has only one participant, and in that situation the symbolic meaning is established in another way (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). These semiotic modes are used in combination to understand the representational meta-function.

The **interactive meta-function** or meaning is concerned with the relationship between the participants in the image or text, as well as the relationship between the whole artefact and the reader/viewer (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 117). Three semiotic resources are active in this meta-function. The first is the image gaze, which involves the eye line of the represented participants in relation to the reader. If the participant is looking directly at the viewer, this creates what is called a demand, and usually creates a feeling of engagement or involvement with the viewer. If the participant is looking away from the viewer, this creates an offer, which causes less engagement and the participant to become the object of contemplation for the viewer. The second semiotic resource is distance and intimacy, which

refer to how close the participants in the image appear to the viewer. The closer the participant – for example a close-up on the face – the more intimate the viewer may feel towards the participant. This works in contrast to a far distance – where the viewer can see the entire figure of the participant – which could result in a feeling of social distance resulting in less intimacy between the participant and the viewer (Harrison, 2003, p. 53; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Lastly, this meta-function makes use of perspective, both on the horizontal angle and the vertical angle, to create differences in involvement and power, respectively. A participant placed at a frontal angle with the viewer might create a sense of involvement or openness, while a participant at an oblique angle could create a sense of separation or detachment (Harrison, 2003, pp. 53-54). Similarly, the degree of the vertical angle by which the viewer sees the participant will create different power relationships between them. For example, at a high angle, where the viewer is looking down at the participant, the participant is seen to have less or no power. But at a low angle, where the viewer is looking up at the participant, the participant is given symbolic power. It is through a combination of all of these semiotic resources that the interactive meta-function operates within an image (Harrison, 2003, p. 53; Jewitt & Oyama, 2001; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). However, the power, distance and angles used do not intrinsically hold the meaning of the image, but rather are part of the language of images used in the attempt to convey a meaning created in the image by the producers and viewers (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001, p. 135).

The last meta-function identified by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, p. 175) is the **compositional metafunction** or meaning. They suggest that there are three semiotic resources at work within this metafunction, while Harrison (2003, pp. 57-58) and Jewitt & Oyama (2001, pp. 151-153) suggest a fourth which I will include. The first semiotic resource is referred to as the information value (or placement) of the participants in the image which can allow the participants to take on, what Harrison (2003) calls, different information roles. These roles vary along with the left/right, top/bottom and centre/margin position of the participant in the image (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 177). Participants placed on the left-hand side of the image are assigned the value of given knowledge, which creates a sense of common sense or the familiar, while participants on the right are assigned the value of new knowledge, an issue, problem or sometimes a solution. Similarly, a participant placed at the top of the image is given the value of the ideal (imaginary or visionary), while a participant placed at the bottom is given the value of the real (factual or practical). Finally, participants at the centre of the image are suggested to have the value of the nucleus of the image, while all

surrounding participants or elements are lesser or subservient to it (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Harrison, 2003).

The second semiotic resource is referred to as salience. This refers to the participants' ability to capture and hold the attention of the viewer using size, focus, tone and colour contrast, and foreground/backgrounding (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 177). These elements are simple: a participant who is large, in focus and in the foreground of the image will be more salient, and therefore more noticeable, than a participant who is small, out of focus and in the background of the image. Tonal and colour contrast can have a similar effect: where an image has high tonal contrast or strongly saturated colour it will be more salient and therefore more noticeable. These elements can be used by the creator to construct different hierarchies in an image that could subvert the norm. For example, a smaller backgrounded character might be placed in sharper focus or more vibrant colours to make it more salient than the participants in the foreground.

The third semiotic resource at work in this meta-function is framing. The way participants are framed in the image is an indication of whether they are connected or disconnected from each other. This can be achieved using framing or dividing lines that are applied to hold together or separate participants in an image. Disconnection can be achieved by dividing participants through framing as well as other elements such as empty space or contrasts of colour, tone, sharpness and form. Connection between participants can be created by using the same elements, but to create a sense of similarity (Harrison, 2003, p. 57-58; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996).

The fourth and final semiotic resource posited by Harrison (2003) and Jewitt and Oyama (2001) is that of modality. This refers to how the viewer feels about the 'realness' or 'truthfulness' of the image. The higher the modality of an image the closer to reality it seems. A colour photograph of a river and a bridge would have a high modality versus the low modality of an impressionist painting of the same participants. Modality is judged on a spectrum (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 166) with specific markers such as colour saturation and modulation, contextualisation, depth of perspective and illumination. Although this is a useful way to analyse the compositional meta-function of an image, Harrison (2003, p. 58) points out that identifying the truthfulness of an image might be problematic because an images modality can vary according to the viewer's sense of 'realness'. For example, an

image might have low modality according to the literature, yet the viewer might find the image holds great validity and meaning for them.

These three meta-functions of visual social semiotics are interested in answering three questions: 1. What is the image about? 2. How does the picture engage with the viewer? 3. How do the participants in the image and the first two meta-functions operate in relationship to one another and create meaning? (Harrison, 2003). These questions are helpful in analysing images (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001, p. 154). But they do not offer all that I need (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001, p. 154) to complete my analysis of *Kwezi*, because they do not consider what kinds of ideologies might inform the different constructions in the images or written text. Therefore, in conjunction with the three metafunctions of visual social semiotics I will be using Thompson's modes of operational ideology to analyse how masculinity is constructed in the selected story arc from *Kwezi*.

Ideological analysis

Thompson developed what he calls a critical conception of ideology that countered the neutral conception of ideology (Thompson, 1984; Thompson, 1983). He distinguishes between two general types of ideology: the first is the neutral conception of ideology which viewed ideology as neither good nor bad, and not more problematic than any other element of social life (Thompson, 1990, p. 53; Janks, 1998, p. 198). The second view is the critical/negative conception of ideology which Thompson summarises as "meaning in service of power" or, "the ways in which meaning serves to establish and sustain relations of domination" (Thompson, 1990; Thompson, 1983). Thompson (1990) theorises that domination is established when relations of power are "systematically asymmetrical": meaning that certain groups are given power in a way that excludes other parties, even to the point of inaccessibility (Janks, 1998, pp. 198-199). Thompson's critical/negative conception of ideology is interested in the relations of domination through symbolic forms and how they are applied to individuals in a socio-historical context (Thompson, 1990, p. 56). He formulated a group of general modes through which ideology can operate in the world: legitimation, dissimulation, unification, fragmentation and reification which can each be broken down into separate strategies of symbolic construction (Janks, 1998; Thompson, 1990). These modes can act independently or in conjunction with one another to operate in the negative conception of ideology (Thompson, 1990, p. 60; Janks, 1998, p. 199).

The first mode is legitimation, which is the process in which relations of domination are created and maintained by being represented as proper, appropriate and worthy of support (Thompson, 1990, p. 61). This is usually achieved through three discursive strategies: universalisation, rationalisation and narrativisation (Janks, 1998; Thompson, 1990). Universalisation is when certain institutional arrangements that favour a select group are represented as favouring all groups. Rationalisation is the process by which the producer of a symbolic form will justify a set of social relations that subordinate others through what Thompson describes as a "chain of reasoning" that persuades the audience that it is worthy of support (Thompson, 1990). Finally, narrativisation is the process by which stories are used to naturalise, through embodying 'truths', social constructions in the world that do not favour a diverse set of communities (Janks, 1998; Thompson, 1990).

The second mode is dissimulation, where domination is maintained through deflecting attention away from existing oppression and by concealing, denying or obscuring the domination (Thompson, 1990). This is accomplished through displacement, trope, and euphemism. Displacement transfers positive or negative connotations from one object to another by referring to the object in a different way. Trope, similarly is used to obscure meaning through the practice of using figurative language – such as synecdoche, metonymy or metaphor – to enable parts to stand for wholes, and wholes to stand for parts. Finally, euphemism is a way for actions, institutions or social relations to be re-described in terms that create a positive valuation. An example of this is violent suppression of protests being described as "restoring order" (Janks, 1998, p. 199; Thompson, 1990).

The third and fourth modes are processes that are on opposite ends of a scale: unification and fragmentation. Unification seeks to create a collective identity for subjects, despite differences that separate them, for an ideological objective, while fragmentation divides subjects despite their similarities in an effort to make them weaker and easier to rule (Janks, 1998, pp. 199-200). Examples of unification are standardisation, such as using one language as a national language to create a collective identity, and using symbols to unify, such as flags, national anthems and sports teams. Fragmentation operates using elements of differentiation – by emphasising distinctive characteristics and differences, and the negative framing of an enemy for the readers/viewers to unite against and resist (Thompson, 1990; Janks, 1998).

The fifth and final of Thompson's modes of operational ideology is reification. Reification is when the "relations of domination and subordination may be established and sustained by representing a transitory, historical state of affairs as if it were permanent, natural, outside of time" (Thompson, 1990, p. 65). This involves the destruction or suppression of the social and historical nature of an event to conceal its origin for an ideological purpose (Janks, 1998, p. 200; Thompson, 1990). This is accomplished through naturalisation, externalisation, nominalisation, and passivisation. Naturalisation is the process by which realities that are socially constructed are represented as natural, i.e. 'from nature' as opposed to 'from culture', which is a social construct. Externalisation is when customs and traditions found in one socio-cultural context are extracted and turned into a-historical events that remain unchanged and outside of time. The linguistic processes of nominalisation are processes by which a verb is changed into a noun: for example, "The president has decided to ban immigrants" gets changed to "the banning of immigrants". Passivisation occurs when the active voice is changed into the passive voice: so instead of saying, "The FBI are pursuing the suspect" it becomes, "the suspect is being pursued". Both processes are used to remove the actor and refocus the reader/hearer on certain preferred themes (Janks, 1998, p. 200; Thompson, 1990).

Ideology is a site of struggle, and the media and popular culture (such as comic books) have been part of exercising and maintaining power through their influence, to shape people's views (Turner, 1990, p. 197 & 202). Thompson's description of the operation of ideology is a useful way to analyse the relation between symbolic forms, linguistic and visual texts, and the social context (Janks, 1998). They provide me with a way to conduct an ideological analysis of both the written and visual elements in the selected story arc from *Kwezi*.

Narrative analysis

I will use the three main theories of narrative by Propp, Todorov and Levi-Strauss (Levi-Strauss, 1967; Propp, 1968; Todorov, 1981) to analyse the narrative of the story arc as a whole in relation to identified themes in the constructions of masculinity. Todorov's narrative theory will assist in helping identify transformation of the narrative from equilibrium, to disruption, to the new equilibrium (Prinsloo, 2009, p. 217; Todorov, 1981). This type of analysis will assist in identifying the types of equilibrium in the comic, both initial and new, as well as what counts as disruption. This will enable the identification of different preferred constructions of masculinity and those that are constructed as a 'problem' (Prinsloo, 2009, p. 221). Propp's narrative theory will assist in the positioning of the different characters within

his 31 narrative functions, specifically the hero and antagonist (Propp, 1968). This will reveal the type of constructions of masculinity that exist within the hero and the antagonist and therefore show the preferred and rejected masculinities. Finally, Levi-Strauss' theory of narrative allows for the analysis of the story arc and its characters in relation to the binary oppositions created in the narrative (Prinsloo, 2009, p. 237; Levi-Strauss, 1967). The manner in which the characters and events within the narrative are constructed creates different binaries within the story arc that are then classified as preferred and rejected (Prinsloo, 2009, p. 238; Berger, 1997, p. 29). These different theories will work together to give an analytic overview of the story arc and summarise the in-depth visual social semiotics and ideological analysis, which will identify the constructions of masculinity within the selected story arc.

In chapter four I will analyse the texts using the frameworks presented above. Using Todorov, Propp and Levi-Strauss' narrative theory (Levi-Strauss, 1967; Propp, 1968; Todorov, 1981), I will identify the themes of masculinity present in the story arc and how these are constructed in the narrative and the characters. Then I will conduct an ideological analysis of the text using Thompson's modes of operational ideology (Thompson, 1990) to uncover the construction of masculinity in the selected sequences and panels. Finally, I will use Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) visual semiotic method to conduct an in-depth analysis describing the features of the images, their participants, and semiotic resources, using them as evidence to support my ideological analysis.

Selection of data and criteria for selection

Mkize has noted that *Kwezi* is a South African superhero comic book made for South Africans. My interest is in how his construction of Kwezi's masculinity is informed by his understanding of the South African gender order. After conducting a general thematic analysis of the entire series of comics[16] one story arc stood out among the rest in the construction of Kwezi's masculinity. The story arc that stands out is Kwezi's journey to a mountainous island to regain and augment his powers, becoming the superhero he was meant to be. This loosely links to the Xhosa male initiation rituals in which young boys are taken to a mountain to be initiated into manhood by their elders. The initiation is a sacred and treasured part of Xhosa culture, which is treated with much secrecy (Wright, 2018; Morrell,

[16] See rough notes on results in appendix B

2001). There are similarities and parallels between Kwezi's journey to become a true superhero and the journey from boyhood to manhood. It is thus important to see what conceptions of masculinity the author uses in his construction of a popular culture superhero. Kwezi's transformation into a superhero in this story arc also sets the tone for his character and actions throughout the rest of the comic. Given the concern about the prevalence of 'toxic' South African masculinities (Morrell, 1998; Morrell, 2001; Wood & Jewkes, 2001), it is therefore culturally significant how a popular superhero's masculinity is constructed. It is for these reasons that I have chosen the story arc of Kwezi going to the mountain, as the central focus of my analysis.

Before proceeding reader is encouraged to read the synopsis of the comic is Appendix A to gain a background understanding of the narrative and the character within the comic and the story arc.

The story arc selected for analysis takes place over issue five and six in collector's edition two. The story arc is made up of 95 panels, 79 of which are relevant to my study – some were discarded because they were not useful for the analysis. The sequences of panels can be found on pages two to three, five and seven to 10 of issue five, and pages one and three to 10 of issue six. Through a narrative and thematic analysis of this story arc, I have broken the story arc down into seven sequences (groups of panels) and identified in each sequence representations of different elements of masculinity.

Each sequence can be broken down into Kwezi's interactions with the Shadow[17] character, the only other character present in this story arc. In the context of this story arc, the Shadow is the personification of Kwezi's fear, doubts and reservations about himself and his purpose. During the story arc, Kwezi grapples with the Shadow in four encounters and finally defeats him after regaining his superpowers. This process of overcoming the Shadow exhibits elements of masculinity that are interesting in the light of my study and each sequence exhibits some of these elements.

[17] This character remains nameless throughout the story arc. However, at the end of the story arc Kwezi does refer to him as a "big shadow" and so I will refer to him as the Shadow from here on out.

Sequence one (issue five, page two and three) consists of 13 panels. In this sequence the viewer sees the first interaction between Kwezi and the Shadow. Kwezi's disempowerment is established through the Shadow's words and actions, and Kwezi's failed attempts to attack him. The Shadow continues to reinforce Kwezi's lack of power, suggesting that he is lost without it, and leaves Kwezi staring up at his goal – the sanctuary at the peak of the mountain. *Sequence two* (issue five, page five) consists of nine panels. After running through the forest Kwezi is bound in the air by vines. The Shadow appears again to challenge Kwezi and his abilities. Kwezi then uses the last sliver of his power to break free of the vines. *Sequence three* (issue five, page seven and eight) consists of 14 panels. Kwezi races through the forest to get away from the Shadow and move towards the sanctuary. However, he is caught in quicksand. The Shadow continues his torment of Kwezi as is he slowly submerged into the sand. The sequence ends with Kwezi disappearing into the quicksand. *Sequence four* (issue five, page nine to 10) consists of six panels. The pages do have panels from the Mohau and Khoi story arc that spills over into the panels dedicated to Kwezi's story arc. Here the leader of the three pillars speaks to Kwezi's situation, describing how, if Kwezi is the chosen one, it is his resolve and individual strength that will get him to overcome any obstacle. During this speech Kwezi emerges from the sinking sand and begins to ascend the mountain. *Sequence five* (issue six, page one) consists of four panels in which Kwezi stands at the foot of a huge wall separating him from the sanctuary, with no obvious entrance or way forward. The Shadow appears again to continue his persecution of Kwezi's masculinity, repeating much of the rhetoric he has expressed in the previous sequences. *Sequence six* (issue six, page three and four) consists of six panels. Here the Seer's conversation with Mohau and Khoi spills over into Kwezi's story arc again. Kwezi's makes a transition from doubt to resolve as he raises his fist and smashes a hole in the wall. Kwezi stands in the gaping hole in the wall as the Shadow screams in frustration and the paint begins to wash off his face. *Sequence seven* (issue six, page five to 10) consists of 27 panels and is the longest sequence in this story arc. It can be broken down into three distinct parts: the confrontation with the Shadow, the bestowing of power, and the erasure of the Shadow. In this sequence Kwezi rejects the Shadow's words and steps into his new identity as a superhero and a man. This results in the bestowal of more power, a new superhero suit and the destruction of the Shadow and the island. As the island explodes Kwezi flies away, to return to his family and homeland

My analysis cannot, due to space, include all these sequences. However, some of the sequences deal with identical themes and so I will select certain sequences over others. I have selected sequences one, three, six and seven. Sequence one – of which I will analyse eight panels (one, three to five and eight to 11), sequence three – of which I will analyse four panels (eight to 11), sequence six – of which I will analyse four panels (one to three and five). In sequence seven, my analysis will be conducted along the lines of the three parts previously mentioned. In part one I will analyse four panels (one to four); part two, five panels (nine, 14, 15, 18, 21); and in part three, four panels (23, 25, 26, 30). The total number of panels for analysis will be 29. Each sequence contains varying themes in differing intensities. My analysis will take into consideration the whole sequence, focusing on certain panels within the sequence that portray the following themes: progress and success in manhood; physical strength, and violence and emotionlessness; the male body; and the self-made man, authority and control. This is to avoid a bloated analysis that doesn't critically engage with the comic and will provide me with the space to more effectively conduct my analysis through narrative theory, visual social semiotics and Thompson's modes of operational ideology.

Unfortunately, *Kwezi* does not have numbered pages, making referencing the comic difficult. I have numbered the pages of the comic myself starting with the first page after the cover of each issue. To make this process more understandable, the pages, sequences and panels referenced will be numbered and placed in Appendix C for easy access.

Chapter four
Analysis – success, strength, violence and emotions as markers of manhood

In the following two chapters I will discuss the construction of Kwezi's masculinity in the superhero comic, *Kwezi*. During my analysis, I will look at several themes that constitute the construction of Kwezi's masculinity within the story arc. The story arc begins with Kwezi washing up on the shore of the mountainous island. He is greeted at spear-point by the Shadow, the only other character in the story arc. Kwezi and the Shadow encounter each other multiple times during Kwezi's journey to the sanctuary at the summit of the mountain. In each encounter in sequences one to four Kwezi is defeated. This changes in sequence six, when Kwezi takes his first steps to regain his power and this process culminates in sequence seven as he emerges as a fully-fledged superhero, complete with bulging muscles and a new superhero costume. The selected sequences (one, three, six and seven) are significant because they deal with the themes of masculinity that exemplify the process of becoming a man. These themes were derived from a thematic analysis of the whole comic which allowed me to identify the particular themes that constructed Kwezi's masculinity. This was then followed up by a more in-depth analysis of the story arc and the selected sequences using three different methods.

First, using Todorov, Propp and Levi-Strauss' narrative theories (Propp, 1968; Levi-Strauss, 1967; Todorov, 1981), I identified the different constructions of masculinity that are present at different stages of the story arc. Then, using Thompson's (1990) modes of operational ideology, I analysed how these constructions of masculinity operated in the service of power within the text and images found within the individual sequences. Finally, using visual social semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996), I analysed the visual elements found within the panels of the selected sequences to identify the constructions of masculinity. I conduct a separate analysis of the visual and textual elements for pragmatic reasons, but the text and images in the panels work in unison to create meaning (Eisner, 1985; McCloud, 1993). The analysis will be broken up into two parts. Chapter Four will discuss the themes of both progress and success in manhood and physical strength, and violence and emotionlessness. Chapter Five will discuss the themes of both the male body, and the self-made man, authority

and control. These themes were selected because of their connection to the process of becoming a man and their positioning regarding Connell's three aspects of gender power. The themes of progress and success, and the self-made man, authority and control were selected because of their link to the aspect of labour power in which men are called to lead, progress and dominate (Morrell, 2001, p. 8). Physical strength, violence and emotionlessness, and the male body were selected because of their link to the aspect of power that deals with the multiple actions men take vis-à-vis other men or women (Morrell, 2001, pp. 8-9). Each theme represents how power is exercised in relation to different aspects of gender power.

I will argue that at the end of the story arc the masculinity that Kwezi has come to embody is constructed as a physically strong and muscular, violent and emotionless, self-made man (not boy) who is in control, successful, and overcomes obstacles no matter who or what they might be.

Progress and success in manhood

The theme of progress and success was identified in relation to the domination of men in the work place (Connell, 1987; Morrell, 2001). The consequences of this is the notion that success, or at least making progress towards success, is constructed as masculine and any man outside of this representation is considered feminine (Morrell, 2001, pp. 8-9). For Kwezi the success he is aiming for is the return of his powers and his success or progress in this endeavour is constructed proportionally to his masculine representation. When he succeeds, he is masculine, and when he fails, he is constructed as a boy. This is evident from early in the story arc in sequence one. At the start of sequence one Kwezi loses his powers as he plummets from the sky, falling into the ocean and then washing up on the beach of the mountainous island. This loss of power represents what Todorov calls a disruption to an initial equilibrium (Todorov, 1981). The initial equilibrium, established in issues one to four, is Kwezi's having supernatural abilities. His actions with these abilities construct him as an entitled and arrogant young man, who uses his powers to gain fame and undermine the authority of the police. The disruption, which occurs due to his loss of super powers, sets off a series of events, the most prominent of which is his quest to regain his powers. The first interaction with the Shadow at the start of sequence one emphasises the theme of progress and success by constructing the binary of success versus failure in the Shadow and Kwezi

respectively. Due to Kwezi's lack of progress and inability to succeed, the Shadow defines Kwezi as a failure.

Kwezi is a failure because he has no power, he must progress to regain his power, and it is positive if he succeeds and negative if he fails. This is a chain of reasoning (rationalisation) established at the start of sequence one that justifies the theme of progress and success as masculine. Thompson defines this chain of reasoning as being a rationalisation which is used to represent something as legitimate and worthy of support (Janks, 1998, p. 199; Thompson, 1990). This justification is evidenced in the Shadow's words throughout the sequence, indicating Kwezi is not prepared (panel one), "not off to a good start" (panel three), and his need to rely on "something else" to succeed rather than his power (panel 10 & 11). This chain of reasoning relegates Kwezi to the position of the failure and constructs success and progress as masculine ideals.

This chain of reasoning is constructed within this sequence through a few other elements as well. The first and most common is the position of Kwezi and the Shadow within the panels of this sequence. This is referred to as the character's information value (Harrison, 2003, pp. 56-57; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). A character's information value in an image constructs them in a certain way. Characters on the left of an image have the value of being familiar, while those on the right have the value of being an issue or a solution depending on the context of the narrative (Harrison, 2003, p. 57). Throughout the sequence, barring the concluding frames, Kwezi is on the left of each panel and the Shadow on the right. This indicates that Kwezi is 'the given', or what is known in the panel, and the Shadow is 'the issue or problem' (Harrison, 2003, p. 56). This makes sense as the Shadow is the antagonist of this story arc. However, analysing this through the lens of the theme of progress and success, a relationship between power and progress emerges. Kwezi's fixed left position represents his inability to progress in the face of his adversary, the Shadow. Kwezi takes violent action to correct the situation and regain power in the interaction, but is thwarted twice, reinforcing the idea that lack of progress is equivalent to failure. The theme of progress and success continues throughout the story arc and has many consequences for Kwezi, one of which is how he acts to progress. Progress is linked to the regaining of power in sequence seven, because by progressing to the top of the mountain and succeeding in making it to the sanctuary, Kwezi is rewarded with his powers. The consequences of this power are his ability to dominate and overcome the Shadow, linking power and domination (Connell, 1985, p.

260; Morrell, 1998). Kwezi's moves from failure to success signals this construction as a feature of dominant masculinity.

In panel three and four of sequence one the Shadow demeans Kwezi by emphasising his inability to progress and infantilises him by calling him a "city boy". Kwezi does attempt to make progress in panel eight, by launching himself at the Shadow to get past him. With this action there is an expected change in information value (from left to right) and therefore a step towards progress and success. However, this is disrupted in panel nine as Kwezi crashes to the ground in front of the Shadow. The events in panel 10 reinforce the disruption of Kwezi's power and his failure in the sequence. Kwezi crouches bent over, looking at his hands in disbelief at his lack of superpowers, while the Shadow strolls away in background, speaking derisively to Kwezi. In panel 11 Kwezi is drawn to the right of the panel, which would suggest progress, however by drawing the Shadow walking across to the left side of the panel Mkize suggests that this progress is given to Kwezi rather than taken by his own strength or will. This reinforces Kwezi's state of failure despite his perceived progress because he did not achieve this progress himself and therefore it is not a true success.

The connection between this story arc and the Xhosa male initiation ceremony creates a backdrop of tradition that justifies the quest Kwezi has undertaken as well as prioritises the success of the quest and its reward, the return of Kwezi's powers. This is evidenced by the prophecy and history Mkize creates for the comic. This constructs Kwezi as the chosen one and a messianic figure, a typical theme for protagonists in the superhero genre (Stevens, 2015). The Shadow attacks Kwezi's identity through his name, which in isiXhosa and isiZulu means star. By calling it "star nonsense", the Shadow is implying that Kwezi's name itself is a broken piece of his identity. By creating this topic of conflict between Kwezi and the Shadow in sequence three, Mkize creates a narrativisation of the quest Kwezi is undertaking to regain his powers. Narrativisation is the use of stories and tradition to justify a single truth for a diverse community (Janks, 1998, p. 199). This story arc's link to Xhosa male initiation ceremonies constructs Kwezi's journey as a natural part of his growth as a man and justifies the theme of progress and success as masculine.

Due to Kwezi's need to fulfil his quest to get to the sanctuary at the top of the mountain, physical movement is linked to progress and success so far in the story arc. This continues in sequence three through the actions of the Shadow and the physical restriction of Kwezi. In

panel eight, after frantically running through the forest, Kwezi finds himself stuck in sinking sand. This is similar to the physical restraint Kwezi experiences in sequence two (when he is trapped by vines). As he sinks deeper into the sinking sand, the Shadow appears and begins taunting him. By restraining Kwezi's legs in the quick sand he is again constructed as a failure due to his inability to progress further. This failure is reiterated in panel 11 of sequence three. The Shadow is drawn to the right of the panel while also being placed at a high vertical angle. This assigns him the right information value (the issue or problem) and Kwezi is repositioned on the left. The Shadow is repositioned as Kwezi's obstacle once again. This reiterates Kwezi's inability to make progress towards his goal, giving a sense that he is going backwards and that he is a failure. This further constructs Kwezi as weak and incapable of making progress, while simultaneously disempowering him further as he sinks deeper into the sinking sand. At the close of this sequence Kwezi is completely swallowed up by the sinking sand and his failure seems to be permanent. However, this only sets the stage for his come back and the continued narrativisation and rationalisation (Thompson, 1990) of the themes of progress and success as masculine.

The shift in which Kwezi is constructed from failure to success begins in sequence four when he pulls himself from the quick sand and ascends to the summit of the mountain, reaching the sanctuary. And in sequence five and six Kwezi takes his first successful action to progress towards his goal, punching the wall that separates him from the sanctuary. Throughout sequence six, each panel is set at a medium vertical perspective angle. Although this has been done before to indicate a sense of equal power between the Shadow and Kwezi, it has never been done so consistently throughout a sequence. This indicates the beginning of a meaningful and permanent power shift between the Shadow and Kwezi, which is seen in the events of sequence seven.

When Kwezi begins his transformation from failure to success there is a naturalisation of progress and success at any cost or 'the ends justify the means' concept. In sequence six and seven Kwezi makes the most meaningful progress towards his goal and at the end of sequence seven succeeds in completing his quest to become a true superhero. This is justified through the construction of the Shadow as the antagonist of the story arc and therefore as the obstacle to be overcome. In sequence six Kwezi moves to the preferred binary of success and no longer occupies the position of failure. There is now a permanent power shift between Kwezi and the Shadow because Kwezi has overcome the Shadow and is permanently and

successfully moving towards his goal. After the destructive events of sequence six, in which Kwezi regains his super strength and punches a hole in the wall dividing him from the sanctuary, Kwezi is drawn on the right of the panel and therefore has a new information value (Harrison, 2003, p. 57). For the entirety of sequence seven, when both the Shadow and Kwezi are featured in a panel, Kwezi is drawn on the right and the Shadow is drawn on the left. This constructs Kwezi as the master of himself and his destiny.

In panel one of sequence seven the Shadow makes a futile attempt to fight Kwezi and prevent him from progressing. The action vector from left to right in this panel creates a narrative that the Shadow might be able to stop Kwezi, as he moves towards the right of the panel to regain his place as the obstacle or problem. This is disrupted quickly and suddenly in panel two, when Kwezi punches the Shadow back into the left-hand side of the panel. This action reaffirms Kwezi's success and his permanent progress towards the attainment of his powers.

Kwezi is now the one with the power and the Shadow has none. This is evidenced in panel three by the reactional vector created by the Shadow's eye line looking up at Kwezi. This concretely establishes the new power dynamic in the sequence and, with Kwezi standing over the Shadow, is a role reversal of their first encounter in panel one of sequence one. The low vertical angle of the Shadow in the panel creates the notion of his new powerless state as he looks upwards towards Kwezi. The Shadow is also framed in this panel by both the hole in the wall behind him and Kwezi's legs. This contains the Shadow, confining him and making him powerless in the presence of Kwezi. The results of this interaction construct Kwezi's progress and success as domineering and often violent (seen in the punch in the previous panel).

Kwezi has now begun to identify the Shadow as the source of his problems and take control of the situation. The image in panel four has a reactional vector created by Kwezi's downward glance as well as the action vector created by his finger, pointing in accusation at the Shadow on the ground. The framing of Kwezi in this panel contrasts with the framing of the Shadow in panel three. Where the Shadow was contained, Kwezi is not, he is fully mobile and able to make progress towards his goal. In this interaction the hero has begun to overcome the villain and progress towards completing his quest. Kwezi's construction as the hero of the story arc naturalises the theme of progress and success through the reification of the interactions between the Shadow and Kwezi as natural.

The divine nature of Kwezi's coming to power is the final step in the justification that progress and success lead to power and are therefore masculine and aspirational. After Kwezi overcomes the Shadow and goes into the sanctuary, his reward is a bestowal of power and a new skin-tight superhero suit. There is a sense of the divine in the 'heavenly' light seen in the group of panels containing the events inside of the sanctuary. The process of the bestowal of power is emphasised through the multiple panels dedicated to this process. This choice of moment (McCloud, 2006, pp. 12-13) in these panels emphasises the reward Kwezi receives for successfully making it to the sanctuary. Even though the actions Kwezi has taken to make this progress have been violent and destructive, the divine nature of Kwezi's reward justifies these actions. By representing the events of Kwezi's rebirth as a superhero as stereotypically 'good' his violent actions and progress are represented in the same way. This reiterates that progress and success are masculine attributes and contribute to the construction of Kwezi's masculinity.

The conclusion of this divine representation confirms the new power dynamic between the Shadow and Kwezi and further distances the now demi-godlike Kwezi from the more human looking Shadow. After being clothed in his new superhero suit Kwezi descends from the sky to meet the Shadow cowering on the ground, shocked at his transformation. Kwezi's new powerful nature is reiterated by the low vertical perspective of the panel. The soft focus on Kwezi created by the light as well as the contrast between the light and his black suit, makes Kwezi the focus of the panel. It also gives Kwezi a lower modality (less realistic), further emphasising his new, powerful divine nature. Kwezi has succeeded in completing his quest, and his reward is a power that allows him to overcome both the Shadow and the island on which his disempowerment took place. This is the final justification of the theme of progress and success in the story arc. How Kwezi makes this progress is also quite important because it is what allows Kwezi to succeed at the end of the story arc, and constructs the actions taken by a masculine man.

Throughout the establishment of the themes of progress and success in the story arc a contradiction forms in the relationship between violence and progress. In sequence one, Kwezi's disempowerment is represented by his low vertical position in panels one, two, three and four, with the Shadow standing over him establishing himself as powerful and holding a spear in Kwezi's face. To break this power dynamic and to progress, Kwezi uses his strength

to break the Shadow's spear and kick him away. Progress is made through violence. However, in panels eight and nine when Kwezi uses his power of flight to attack the Shadow he fails, and the Shadow points out in panel 10 and 11 that he needs "something else to rely on" (panel 11). This form of displacement – where a new association is created for a symbol (Thompson, 1990) – re-associates Kwezi's superpowers as a negative thing at the close of sequence one. This creates a sense that Kwezi might not need to rely on brute strength to progress. However, this displacement is contradicted in sequence two after Kwezi is trapped in vines and must use his super strength to escape and to progress. The Shadow then reveals that Kwezi has used the last of his power and must again rely on something else. This is reiterated in sequence three when Kwezi is trapped in quick sand and is unable to save himself. But this is contradicted again in sequence four as Kwezi pulls himself from the quicksand with his own strength (whether this is his super strength is not made clear) and makes it to the summit of the mountain. The contradiction continues in sequence six and becomes permanent in sequence seven as Kwezi's super strength returns which allows him to punch a hole in the giant wall separating him from the sanctuary. Once again, the way Kwezi progresses is through the violent use of his powers. This continues until the conclusion of the story arc. The displacement of Kwezi's superpowers from something helpful to something that burdens him early in the story arc only serves to hide the truth: that Kwezi can only make progress using his powers and through physical violence. The trope of metonymy – in which a part stands for a whole (Thompson, 1990) – is used to define and redefine Kwezi as a failure and then a success through the representation of the use of his superpowers. This creates a connection between the success versus failure binary and the use of violence. Although, at the beginning of the story arc it might seem different, by the end, progress and success are linked to the violent use of Kwezi's super strength which then constructs violent action as masculine and part of Kwezi's masculinity.

Physical strength, violence and emotionlessness

The themes of physical strength, violence and emotion have been identified by Connell in relation to the use of power to dominate (Connell, 1987; Morrell, 2001). Within the story arc these themes justify the use of physical strength in violent ways as a mechanism of domination, as well as the disconnection from emotion as masculine attributes. This contributes to the construction of Kwezi's masculinity, because violence is reaffirmed as a means to progress towards his goal, as well as to disconnect from his emotions to overcome

the Shadow. These themes go through an interesting development over the course of the story arc. In the establishment of an initial equilibrium (Todorov, 1981) in this story, Kwezi is clearly comfortable using his powers violently to catch criminals and undermine the authority of the police and Mohau. This is evidenced in his interaction with the police in issue one and after he attempts to flee Mohau, Azania and Khoi in issue two. However, through the disruption to this initial equilibrium at the start of the story arc (the loss of his superpowers) Kwezi starts to be defined by his inability to successfully outwit the Shadow and his inability to control his emotions. Eventually, Kwezi makes the transition to overcoming the Shadow and is constructed as a violent man. This is seen through his use of physical violence, which sets him on the path to finish his quest to regain his power. Kwezi makes two significant violent actions that lead him towards success, first against an inanimate object and second against the Shadow himself. These actions are significant when viewed in contrast to the first couple of violent attempts by Kwezi in sequence one. This then culminates at the end of sequence seven and Kwezi's emotionless interaction with the Shadow, which leads to his and the island's destruction. According to Propp's narrative theory (Propp, 1968), the antagonist is meant to be overcome by the protagonist. Therefore, the violent destruction of the Shadow at the close of the story arc is justified. Throughout the story arc, although Kwezi comes to embody certain aspects of the Shadow, such as his body construction, this does not imply a good connection between the two. Rather, Kwezi is usurping these aspects of the Shadow and taking them on for himself, destroying the Shadow in the process. This then creates the new equilibrium (Propp, 1968), which has been attained through strength, violence and lack or control of emotion. This sets up a binary (Levi-Strauss, 1967) of strength versus weakness and violence versus non-violence.

Although violence is present throughout the story arc, it is in sequence six that a narrativisation (Thompson, 1990; Janks, 1998, p. 199) of conflict and violence leading to success, begins to emerge. Although, there are no clear references to stories to justify this, there is a sense of tradition being used to do so. This is evidenced in the words of the Seer[18], which spill over from Mohau and Khoi's concurrent story arc in issue five and six, into Kwezi's story arc. This provides the traditional justification for the Seer's words which are: "But now is the time for him to answer his calling, have the courage to confront the conflict

[18] The Seer is linked to sangomas in issue four, which are an important part of amaXhosa and amaZulu spiritual traditions and so has a connection to their culture.

that stands in his way and shatter its foundation". Although in previous panels the Seer does mention a theme of community, the use of the word "but" at the start of the speech bubble appearing in panel one of sequence six suggests a separate agenda. There is a strong suggestion that confrontation, conflict and violence are required to answer Kwezi's "calling" as the chosen one. This reaffirms the notion that to make progress and to step into your destiny as a man you need to take violent action during conflict and confrontation. There is also a displacement of the word "courage" linking this concept to violent action and confrontation. These elements are then constructed as positive because of Kwezi's placement as the protagonist of the comic. The Seer's words seen in panel one are also used in the passive voice, removing any actors from the statement about Kwezi's relation to conflict. This indicates that Kwezi must surpass whatever stands in his way, no matter what, or who it is because there is no clear indication by the Seer who he must act against. This along with the naturalisation of violence to overcome obstacles, found in the usage of the word "shatter", creates a strong theme that violence results in success and constructs violence as masculine and a requirement of manhood.

This is reinforced in sequence six and seven. In panel three of sequence six, Kwezi punches the wall separating him from the sanctuary, that then explodes in a cloud of dust and rocks. This throws the Shadow backwards towards the left of the panel. The dust, rocks and the Shadow's body radiating out from the impact point of Kwezi, create action vectors that indicate Kwezi's power and confirm the return of his super strength. This action narrative also works to create a new information value for the Shadow as he is thrown to the left of the panel removing him from the problem/issue position he has held throughout most of the story arc. In the next panel Kwezi stands at the centre of the hole in the wall. Kwezi's information value at the centre of the panel gives a sense that he has overcome through his physical strength and is comfortable with that knowledge. He is drawn at the centre of the hole, he is focused, and through his resolve and physical strength he has overcome the obstacle in front of him and emerged victorious. This is reinforced in sequence seven when Kwezi's takes successful physical and violent action against the Shadow – which is the second step towards Kwezi's transformation – the first being his punching a hole in the wall. Kwezi has transitioned from violently hitting an inanimate obstacle to violently hitting a human obstacle. When Kwezi punches the Shadow to the ground, this creates a new power dynamic that is opposite to the power dynamic established in sequence one. Although the Shadow has already been constructed as the antagonist, drawing him attempting to prevent Kwezi's

progress in panel one justifies Kwezi's action and constructs his masculinity as violent and dominating. This reflects the violent masculinist gender order pervading South Africa today, which Morrell identifies as the hegemonic masculinity (Wood & Jewkes, 2001; Morrell, 2002).

After Kwezi has punched the Shadow to the ground and gone into the sanctuary to receive his new power and superhero suit, he flies out of the sanctuary and descends from the sky to have one last conversation with the Shadow. After this conversation ends and Kwezi flies away, the same kind of light that filled Kwezi with power in the sanctuary begins to destroy the Shadow from the inside out. And as Kwezi flies away in panel 30, there is a huge explosion behind him that obliterates the Shadow and the island. The explosion of the island completes Kwezi's violent overpowering of his obstacles on the island. This reinforces the violent nature of Kwezi's newly acquired power and masculinity. The consequences of this rationalisation are a reinforcement of the violent nature of Kwezi's power and that progress and success can only be attained through violence. This firmly constructs Kwezi within the preferred binary of violence, versus ineffective non-violence.

There is also a chain of reason that justifies the projection or control of emotions with in this story arc. The chain of reasoning is that Kwezi is a failure and needs to overcome the Shadow to reach his goal. This happens when the Shadow becomes weakened once Kwezi acts violently towards him *and* projects his emotions onto the Shadow by blaming the Shadow for his fears and doubts. The Shadow is then destroyed, which justifies Kwezi's acts as heroic and successful by overcoming the antagonist. After Kwezi has punched the Shadow to the ground he begins to project his "doubts and fears" onto the Shadow by stating that the Shadow is the one that was "making [him] fear and doubt [himself] at every turn". This projection of emotion occurs again later in the sequence leading to the Shadow's destruction. Because of the connection between this story arc and the Xhosa male initiation ritual, this act of projection and control of emotion is indirectly constructed as a masculine attribute, something that all men must learn to do once they make the transition from boyhood to manhood.

This projection or control of emotion occurs one more time in the sequence before the destruction of the Shadow and the island. After Kwezi has gone into the sanctuary to receive his power, he descends from the sky to have one more conversation with the Shadow. In

panels 24, 25 and 26 we see this interaction which mostly repeats the monologue Kwezi had in panel four in which he accuses the Shadow. The power narrative between the Shadow and Kwezi is reiterated by the reactional vectors created by both characters' eye lines and their body posture and position. The Shadow is trembling, bent over and powerless for the entirety of their conversation, while Kwezi stands calmly and upright, speaking down to the Shadow, exuding his newly acquired power. In this interaction Kwezi claims to see the Shadow "for who [he] truly is" and confirms the projection of his emotions (doubts and fears) onto the Shadow, finally stating that the Shadow "no longer has control over [him]". By saying these things to the now completely unmasked Shadow (whose face paint has been washed off by the rain in sequence six and seven) Kwezi is reiterating that he is the one that is in control, of his emotions and his destiny.

As the story arc progresses and Kwezi gains power, the muscular nature of his body is emphasised. This creates a chain of reasoning that connects strength and power to the overly muscular male body. This rationale is seen in different interactions between the Shadow and Kwezi. At the start of the story arc Kwezi has a less muscular frame, and in each encounter with the Shadow in which he loses there is an emphasis placed on his weakness – which is then linked to the representation of his body through his immobility and inability physically overcome the Shadow. This begins to change in sequence five as Kwezi regains his super strength and takes his first successful steps to regaining his power. In sequence seven, with each successful step Kwezi takes towards his goal, his body becomes more muscular. This culminates in the skin-tight superhero suit he gains in the sanctuary. This skin-tight suit is commonplace within the Western superhero genre as well as African superheroes for both males and females, such as *Razor-Man*, *Captain South Africa* and *Kwezi* (there are some exceptions such as Frank Odoi's *Akokhan*), (Stevens, 2015; Nama, 2011). For the male superhero it is a way to place emphasis on the muscular nature of the body, which further indicates physical strength and power. This style of suit also represents a pseudo-nakedness that allows the body to be viewed 'safely' by the reader and even envied. In the context of this moment in the comic it allows the viewer to observe the physical transformation of Kwezi himself, from frail and powerless to muscular and powerful. The suit signifies a new identity for Kwezi as well. In this moment when his old clothes are destroyed, and this new suit is bound to his body there is a sense that he has a new, masculine identity which is

grounded within his physical appearance and power[19]. As the suit is being formed around him and being melded to his body, in panels 15 -21, Kwezi's clenched jaw and closed eyes indicates a sense of pain involved in the process. This could be reflecting the adage 'no pain, no gain' as Kwezi's process of gaining power must be accompanied by a sense of sacrifice. This further emphasises the idea that a type of physical strength is required to be able to withstand or achieve this state of power, reinforcing the prerequisite of physical strength in a male superhero. I will elaborate more on the representation of the male body in chapter five.

So far, the themes of both progress and success, and physical strength, violence and control of emotion have been established as elements of the dominant masculinity (Morrell, 1998, p. 607). At the close of the story arc, Kwezi's quest to regain his power and become a true superhero has constructed his masculinity to reflect elements of the dominant masculinity present in post-apartheid South Africa (Morrell, 2002; Wood & Jewkes, 2001). Kwezi's masculinity has been constructed as successful and capable of overcoming obstacles. This success and progress are made through the violent use of his physical strength (which is linked to his muscular body) and the erasure or control of his emotions. In the following chapter I will unpack the theme of the male body and the theme of the self-made man, authority and control.

[19] Later in the comic this transformation his made less permanent as the reader sees Kwezi transform back into his urban clothes in issue 11, which infers his ability to change between the two outfits at will.

Chapter five
Analysis – the male body, self-made man and authority as markers of manhood

This chapter will discuss the final two themes present in the selected story arc and identify how they construct Kwezi's masculinity. These are the theme of the male body, and the self-made man, authority and control.

Representation of the male body

Within this story arc the representation of the male body (seen in both Kwezi and the Shadow) creates two very clear binaries within the narrative (Levi-Strauss, 1967). The first is that of muscular versus frail, and the second is the urban versus traditional[20]. These two binaries are created through the construction of Kwezi and the Shadow's bodies as well as through their outfits and are representations of two of the masculinities present in the "patchwork of patriarchies" in South Africa (Morrell, 1998; Morrell, 2002). The way in which Kwezi and the Shadow act towards each other and the environment, constructs the urban masculinity as the preferred representation of masculinity. It also constructs certain elements of their bodies and outfits as masculine as well. These preferred elements of masculinity become evident at different points throughout the narrative such as when Kwezi loses his powers at the start of the story arc, when he begins his quest to regain his powers, and when Kwezi begins to regain his powers.

At the start of the story arc Kwezi's loss of power is reflected in his body. Although he might still have muscles, he looks quite thin and frail compared to his super-powered self later in the story arc. Kwezi's transformation from frail to muscular during this story arc naturalises the muscular body as powerful and masculine, a common trope in the construction of male bodies in the superhero comic book genre (Stevens, 2015, p. 18 & 106).

[20] This masculinity is linked to the village, the past and possibly a pre-colonial South Africa. The traditional masculinity is a response to the urban masculinity that began to develop towards the end of Apartheid and in the early stages of the democratic South Africa (Morrell, 2002; Wood & Jewkes, 2001).

At the start of sequence one the Shadow is constructed within the hegemonic representation of male bodies (powerful, muscular and masculine) and Kwezi as a frailer subject. This creates the aspirational body type Kwezi must take on in order to overcome his adversary and succeed in his quest. In panel one of sequence one, after Kwezi has washed up on the beach powerless, he meets the Shadow. The panel views the Shadow from a low vertical angle denoting him with power and connecting that power to the representation of his body. Kwezi's placement at the low angled position looking up at the Shadow reinforces this. The Shadow's threatening stance and his use of a spear constructs Kwezi as a non-warrior and therefore weak. This works to create a clear power distinction between the Shadow and Kwezi. The Shadow is the one holding the physical power in this panel and Kwezi, sprawled out on his back, is powerless. All of this is presented in the frame with a full view of the Shadow's body (close social distance), portraying his character as a strong, traditional male, who is in control. His lack of clothing reveals his highly muscular body and strong sharp facial features (such as his square jaw). All these features are in-line with the superhero comic book genre stereotypes of male bodies (Stevens, 2015). This in combination with the strong salience of the Shadow (he is the largest participant in the frame and in sharp focus) construct him as the antagonist and the obstacle that Kwezi must overcome to progress and regain his power.

The frail body of Kwezi and the strong muscular body of the Shadow remain the same throughout sequences one to five, until the shift in power in sequence six as Kwezi begins to regain his power. This transformation is made more obvious by the loss of Kwezi's leather jacket. The loss of the jacket emphasises the muscles on his arms and chest, which have seemingly grown in size compared to the previous sequences. The Shadow's appearance also begins to change in sequence six as he begins to be unmasked and disempowered. While his outfit doesn't change, the paint on his face begins to wash off in the rain that has been pouring down since sequence five. Within the context of the events of sequence six and seven this indicates a loss of power as Kwezi begins to regain his. There is also a sense that his threat level has decreased, since the paint was in the shape of a skull, creating a less menacing image of the Shadow.

Kwezi has begun to be constructed as powerful and strong, defined by his muscles (especially his arms and chest) which cause his shirt to stretch taunt over them. Kwezi's transformation into his new muscular self is most evident in panel two of sequence six. By representing the

muscular Kwezi in panel two just before the he uses his super strength in panel three a connection is created between the muscular body and power. His face tensed in a screaming pose with lightening in the background – which seems to even pass into him – gives a sense of raw power. This is a noticeable shift from Kwezi's body in previous sequences, which seemed thinner and weaker, versus the bulging muscles seen in this panel. This all indicates the return of Kwezi's super strength and is the first step in the transformation of his body into the archetypal and muscular construction of a superhero's body.

The change in Kwezi's body is made more salient in sequence seven. as the viewer sees examples of the more muscular Kwezi. Now that Kwezi has regained his power, his body reflects this. His body type borrows from the thinner more athletic architype of superhero, like the Flash or Spiderman, however there are parts of his body such as his chest, that have a larger more Superman-like construction. The more athletic body type is usually associated with superheroes whose powers do not include super strength. However, Kwezi not only has the ability to fly and move quickly, but also super strength which must be reflected in the representation of his muscular body. All of this reaffirms the hegemonic concept of a powerful man needing to be overly muscular and physically strong.

After displaying his new-found strength by punching the Shadow to the ground, Kwezi walks up to the chasm dividing him from the sanctuary and leaps off. In panel nine he launches himself into the air, regaining his power of flight. Kwezi's ability to fly panel nine highlights another change that has occurred in Kwezi's body. Although Kwezi is quite small in the panel, it is clear that his chest and his upper torso are substantially larger and more muscular. This increase in muscle mass continues in the following panels and is indicative of Kwezi's increase in physical strength, as he begins to grow into the archetypal body of a superhero.

Throughout sequence seven there is an emphasis placed on the muscular and strong body and its connection to power. This is evidenced by Kwezi's strength which is defined by his large and muscular upper torso as well as his tensed arm muscles and closed fists. In panels 14-21, after flying into the sanctuary, Kwezi begins to be bestowed with power and receive his new superhero body and suit. Panel 14 takes on a more conceptual analytical nature as the viewer is invited to look at Kwezi – caused by the offer (inviting the reader to look at the character) created by Kwezi's averted eyes – as he is changed into a true superhero. These are made more salient by the yellow golden light shining off his arms and fists, while his calm

downward glance indicates a sense of control. While the angelic glow around his body and the light from above indicate an increase in power. There is also an emphasis on his yellow shirt, now stretched taunt over his muscles. This all places an emphasis on the connection between the muscular body and power.

The process of Kwezi receiving his power is represented as a painful process which is made evident in panel 18. This further emphasises the idea that a type of physical strength and fortitude of body is required to be able to withstand or achieve this state of power, reinforcing the prerequisite of the archetypal strong muscular body for a male superhero. One of the most obvious elements of this new Kwezi is his overly muscular body – with his huge chest, torso covered in muscles and large muscular arms and legs. This is highlighted by the skin-tight black suit that makes up most of his superhero outfit. As the suit is being formed around him and being melded to his body, Kwezi's clenched jaw and closed eyes indicates a sense of pain involved in the process. This event concludes in panel 21 as the suit finishes forming on Kwezi's body with the golden ornamentation. This panel takes on a more analytical and symbolic nature as the viewer is asked to make sense of the new Kwezi. Kwezi has now completely taken on his new superhero identity, fitting Coogan's definition of an American superhero in an "iconic costume" (Coogen, 2013, p. 3). Kwezi has achieved his 'final form', the culmination of his struggles and one of the rewards for completing his quest.

After Kwezi's transformation it is clear that his is now the dominant masculinity in the story arc as he finally overcomes the Shadow. In panel 25 of sequence seven the body language of the Shadow sets him up as the weak and powerless character. This is evidenced by the lines around his body which indicate that he is trembling, as well as in his body language, which is bent over. Kwezi's calm emotions and upright body establish him as the powerful character in this panel and shows that Kwezi does not see the Shadow as a threat any longer. The Shadow's face paint has also completely washed off which reinforces his unmasking and his disempowerment. The images in panel 26 repeat the reactional eye line of the Shadow, combine with the close up (intimate distance) of the panel on the Shadow's face, reinforcing the narrative of his powerlessness while also emphasising his emotions, and body language. The Shadow's open mouth, out stretched hands, worried eyes and being still bent over, all reinforce his place as the powerless character in the panel.

At the close of the story arc the new muscular Kwezi emerges victorious. By constructing the narrative in this way and representing Kwezi as the stereotypical muscular superhero, Mkize constructs his body type as the preferred and aspirational masculine body type. This completes the naturalisation of the muscular body as masculine and powerful, and because of Kwezi's position as the protagonist of the story arc, these elements of the masculine body are constructed as aspirational and the social norm.

Although a large portion of the representations of male bodies in this story arc support the muscular versus frail binary, they also construct another binary, that of urban and traditional masculinities. These two binaries are represented by Kwezi and the Shadow's bodies respectively and create a fragmentation of the South African identity.

At the beginning of the story arc, when Kwezi is introduced to the Shadow, they are differentiated from each other through their different stereotypical outfits. This echoes Eisner's comment on the required use of stereotypes to immediately establish a character (Eisner, 2008, pp. 13-14). Kwezi is defined as the urban city boy who is focused on success, money and fame, in contrast to the Shadow who is defined as the warrior, more in tune with nature and his ethnic traditions. This differentiation fragments the South African masculine identity and sets these two masculinities in opposition to each other. At this moment in the story arc this fragmentation constructs the urban as the preferred masculinity, because while it might not be the most powerful in this sequence, it is attributed to the hero of the story arc. The Shadow's place as the antagonist reinforces this because as the villain, he embodies the non-preferred masculinity that must be overcome.

This binary is most clearly represented by Kwezi's and Shadow's clothing at the start of sequence one. Kwezi is still sporting the same set of clothes he has worn for the entire comic up to this point: a black leather jacket over a yellow t-shirt with an icon of the continent of Africa on the chest area, a pair of blue jeans, and a pair of black high-top sneakers. The jeans, high-top sneakers and leather jacket identify Kwezi as an urban youth, wearing trendy clothes. His yellow t-shirt emblazoned with the continent of Africa is suggestive of a consumable or branded African identity (Wright, 2018, p. 215). Kwezi's clothes are indicative of the modern urban South African masculinity mentioned in Morrell (2002) and Wood and Jewkes (2001) that is vying for a place in the new masculine gender order in post-apartheid South Africa. The Shadow's is clothing can be read as symbolising a traditional

masculinity, another masculinity vying for power in the South African gender order (Morrell, 2002; Wood & Jewkes, 2001). The Shadow's appearance remains unchanged throughout this sequence. At the start of the story arc neither of these characters fit completely into the dominant American masculinity for superheroes (Morrell, 1998, p. 607; Stevens, 2015). However, at the close of the story arc, after Kwezi has overcome the Shadow and the masculinity he represents, Kwezi is represented well within the bounds of the American, hegemonic, male superhero masculinity.

While there is a fragmentation of the South African identity in sequences one to six, in sequence seven, when Kwezi receives his superhero suit, there is an ambiguous unification of the South African identity with that of the American superhero seen in his suit (Coogen, 2013). This is evidenced by the events that occur in panels 15-21. The image in panel 15 has strong vertical action vectors created by the beams of light surrounding Kwezi as well as the clothes that are being torn from his body. In this panel Kwezi is being filled with power while also simultaneously being stripped of his urban clothes. This indicates that he is being stripped of his urban masculinity in preparation for his rebirth as a superhero. This process continues in panels 17 and 18 as the black skin-tight suit forms to the body of the now naked Kwezi. The way that the suit is forming onto his body, skin-tight, also portrays that this new identity or nature is being bonded to him.

Kwezi has been remade into a new powerful superhero and represents a combined identity for the black South African (and even African) male. This is evidenced at the end of panels 21 and 22 in the construction of his superhero suit. Firstly, Kwezi's black suit has no defining factors that identify him with any ethnic group in South Africa. The only other parts of the suit are the gold ornamentation on his arms, neck and head. Even these are ethnically ambiguous and have no real connection to any ethnic grouping in South Africa. Kwezi's ethnic ambiguity is contrasted with the ethnic specificity of the other superheroes in his team. Characters like Mohau and Azania quite clearly represent different ethnicities in the South African context. For example, Mohau the Basotho man through his triangle hat, Basotho blanket and staff, and Azania the Zulu woman, through her patterned outfit and Zulu headdress. Mkize claims that by creating a broader, generalised representation for Kwezi, his readers will be able to identify with the protagonist more easily (Smit, 2018).

Kwezi's rebirth as a superhero ends the conflict that has raged between the Shadow and Kwezi, as Kwezi emerges victorious over is adversary. In the context of the urban versus traditional masculinity the lines get a bit blurred here. The Shadow still represents a traditional body, but now he is weak and powerless in comparison to the ethnically ambiguous body of Kwezi. During the events within the sanctuary there is no indication that Kwezi has taken on the Shadow's masculinity, however he does overcome him. Kwezi has now taken on the hegemonic American representation of a male superhero while still retaining his urban masculinity present at the start of the story arc. This is shown in issue 10 where Kwezi can shift between his old urban clothes and his superhero suit at will. This indicates that Kwezi can switch between these identifying bodies and there has been no clear resolution to the conflict between his urban and traditional identity. However, in the context of the story arc on the mountain, it is clear that the new Kwezi overcomes the Shadow, destroying his body and with it the 'traditional/ethnic' masculinity he came to represent.

By the end of the story arc Kwezi's body has been constructed as the strong and muscular body, which exudes power and can overcome his adversary. He also comes to represent an ethnically ambiguous masculinity that is also connected to the American representation of male superheroes (Coogen, 2013; Stevens, 2015). However, at the close of the story arc it is clear that Kwezi's new body is a vehicle through which he gains victory over his obstacles, which fits well within the stereotypical representation of male superheroes in the genre.

The self-made man, authority and control

Although the overarching process from boyhood to manhood is the main theme underlying the entire story arc, there is a more specific theme of the type of man Kwezi must become. This theme is that of the self-made man, who is in control or has authority. I identified this theme both in connection with the domination of men in labour, as well as the process of becoming a man (in connection to the Xhosa male initiation ritual). The self-made man is identified as the man who works to gain his power and who can take control of his life through hard work and willpower (Stevens, 2015, p. 160 & 208). Throughout the story arc Kwezi is going through a process of becoming a self-made man who can take control of his destiny. Furthermore, because Kwezi is constructed as the protagonist, and taking into consideration the divine nature of the bestowal of power, these elements and actions he takes as the self-made man are identified as good and aspirational. Since this story arc borrows

from the Xhosa male initiation ritual, there is a sense that at the end of this process Kwezi has achieved his true potential both as a superhero and as a man. This theme is prevalent throughout the story arc and is evidenced most obviously in the interactions between the Shadow and Kwezi in sequences three and seven.

Throughout the story arc there is a naturalisation of the self-made man, who needs no support and can achieve his goals on his own. This state of manhood is made to seem like a natural, often through the verbal interactions between Kwezi and the Shadow. At the start of the story arc in sequence one the Shadow begins to infantilise Kwezi, claiming he has no self-defined agency and describes him as weak. The language used by the Shadow throughout the sequence also infantilises Kwezi, referring to him as "city boy", "laaitie", and "sunshine" (panel four, seven and ten respectively). Kwezi's angry response to these accusations, seen in panel five, six and eight of sequence one, reaffirms the Shadow's words as unfavourable and not pertaining to true manhood.

In sequence three the Shadow's words throughout the sequence emphasise that a 'real man' makes his own destiny, does not rely on others and is not led, but rather leads. This is evidenced in panel 8 when the Shadow identifies the fact that Kwezi "let that lunatic Mohau trick [him]" and that he let his "daddy tell [him] what to do", rather than choosing to come there himself. This highlights Kwezi's follower or subordinate masculinity, focusing on the fact that he lets "everyone tell [him] what to do and who to be", and does not define his own future. This dialogue differentiates the self-made man from the boy who needs to be told what to do. This further infantilises Kwezi, reinforcing the idea that part of growing up as a man requires self-sufficiency, isolation and ambition. Furthermore, Kwezi is constructed as a child because he lacks these masculine attributes, and in sequence one his inability to make progress places him permanently in that position, infantilising him and leaving him powerless. This reflects what Connell defines as subordination of any masculinity that does not fit the hegemonic form (Morrell, 1998, pp. 607-608; Connell, 1985). This naturalises the self-made man narrative, and in the context of Kwezi's attempt to regain power, conflates the self-made man with power and strength.

In sequence six and seven Kwezi begins to make the transition from a boy who cannot take control or lead, to a man who has command of his own destiny and takes actions to do so. In panel one of sequence six, the combination of the Seer's words, encouraging Kwezi to

“answer his calling”, and the representation Kwezi’s face as resolute, construct the tipping point in Kwezi’s journey to becoming a self-made man. All the actions he takes from this point onwards facilitate the disconnection from the child he was described as in sequences one and three and constructs him as the self-made man who is taking control of his destiny. Although the actions he takes now are similarly violent as those taken in previous sequences, the difference is that these are successful. It is not clear how Kwezi makes this change beyond what the Seer says in panel one of sequence six, but the results are clear: Kwezi is now able to take control and authority over his own destiny. The consequences of Kwezi’s ability to take control and authority in his life are the return of his powers (strength and flight) and his subsequent empowerment within the sanctuary. The divine nature with which Kwezi receives his power and especially the body language he exhibits in panel 21 construct this new self-made Kwezi as positive and reifies this construction of masculinity as natural and aspirational.

The final naturalisation of the elements of control and authority as masculine are exhibited in panels 24-30. Within these panels Kwezi stands unafraid of the Shadow who cowers before him and his new-found power. Kwezi also subjugates and takes control of the Shadow by unmasking him for whom he truly is (seen in the disappearance of the Shadow’s face paint) and blames the Shadow for his emotional upheaval during the story arc. Kwezi is also in control of his emotions in these panels, exhibiting no violent or emotional outbursts as seen in sequences one to four. This element is constructed as positive and masculine, because through this calm and controlled interaction with the Shadow, Kwezi causes the Shadow’s destruction and ultimately succeeds in regaining his powers. Even Kwezi’s face in the final shot in panel 30 is emotionless, as he flies away triumphant and the Shadow and the island explode behind him. This constructs Kwezi in the preferred binary of a man (self-made man), rather than the boy he was identified as at the start of the story arc.

Conclusion

Throughout this story arc Kwezi goes through the process of becoming a man. As he undertakes the quest to regain his powers there are elements of masculinity that are constructed as negative and positive. This is done through the binaries identified using Levi-Strauss’ narrative theory (Levi-Strauss, 1967) as well as the construction of meaning within the images and text. At the start of the story arc Kwezi lacks the elements of a dominant

masculinity. Throughout story arc Kwezi's masculinity is constructed through his interactions with the Shadow and the environment of the mountainous island. At the end of the story arc with the construction of a new equilibrium (Todorov, 1981), the new empowered, superhero Kwezi has emerged victorious. Kwezi's journey throughout this story arc reflects the construction of American male superhero and their journey to power mentioned by Coogen, in which the boy goes through a trial to gain power and return to his people ready to defend them (Coogan, 2018, p. 569; Jeffrey A, 2000). Kwezi is now a physically strong and muscular, violent and emotionless, and self-made man who is in control, successful and overcomes obstacles no matter what they might be. This fits well with the hegemonic American masculinity found within the superhero comic book genre and the dominant masculinity found in the masculinist gender order in South Africa (Morrell, 2002; Stevens, 2015; Wright, 2018; Connell, 1985). This new equilibrium for Kwezi's character does affect his actions further in the comic. Straight after this story arc, Kwezi is set up to rescue Azania – constructed as the damsel in distress – which he does through violent action. He continues to use violence to progress as he struggles to deal with intellectual and emotional issues throughout the comic. When Kwezi is outsmarted or fails – seen in issue 11 & 12 – this results in a rash reaction in which he races off to deal with the villain the only way he knows how, with violence.

Chapter six
Conclusion

In 2014, Loyiso Mkize set out to create a South African superhero comic called *Kwezi*. Mkize states that his motivation for this comic series was to create a superhero that empowered South African youth, as well as give them a superhero to identify with among the already well established genre of majority white American superheroes (Smit, 2018; Wright, 2018, pp. 208-209). The comic series to date (2019) follows Kwezi as he discovers his powers while living on the outskirts of the metropolis of Gold City, modelled on Johannesburg. Kwezi initially uses his powers to gain online fame, but after meeting others like him – Mohau, Azania and Khoi – he realises that there is a deeper calling on his life as a superhero. After his journey on the mountainous island Kwezi returns to Gold City a new man, fully clad in a superhero costume, and joins his fellow superheroes in a quest to stop the villainous Mr. Mpisi. As Mpisi's evil plans unfold, it becomes clear that there is a darker force behind what is happening, and the most recent issue ends with the emergence of a new villain Nerus, and Kwezi and his team being hated by the people of Gold City. As someone whose formative years were influenced by the construction of superheroes in comic books, the construction of these superheroes is of great interest to me. Especially the construction of their masculinities. Therefore, considering Mkize's intentions for *Kwezi*, I set out to analysis the construction of Kwezi's masculinity in the superhero comic book.

Kwezi falls within a well-established genre that is dominated by two American companies, Marvel Comics and DC (Ryall & Tipton, 2009; Robb, 2014). The superheroes these companies have created have formed specific gender and racial orders. There is a strong white racial order in American superhero comics, with a minority of black superheroes (Nama, 2011). Marvel and DC have made efforts to break this racial order since the American Civil Rights movement, however there is still a minority of black superheroes, and almost all of the flagship superheroes are white (Jeffrey A, 2000; Nama, 2011). However, most of these black superheroes are either African American or designed and created by American comic book creators. This means that the blackness in superhero comic books is decidedly American and there is a lack of African and South African blackness in the genre (Wright, 2018). There is also a strong masculinist gender order present in American superhero comic books. Just like their attempt to introduce black characters into their comics

Marvel and DC's attempt to introduce female characters has had varying success (Brown, 2018, p. 120). The result of this is that the majority of male superheroes and a minority of female superheroes. These superheroes are also constructed in a certain way with the male superheroes created to take action, while the female superheroes are created as less active, this often seen in the nature of their superpowers (Coogan, 2018, p. 569; Jeffrey A, 2000). This is most evident in the design of their bodies, with a strong, muscular, violent archetype for the male superheroes and a slim, beautiful archetype for female superheroes (Brown, 2018; Stevens, 2015). This masculinist gender order constructs a hegemonic masculinity that is defined by the majority of male superheroes in the genre. These male bodies are usually strong, muscular, powerful and handsome, and are often defined by their 'lack' of femininity (Brown, 2018, p. 123; De Dauw, 2018, pp. 67-68). And so, any masculinity that defies this hegemonic representation is subordinated (De Dauw, 2018). This racial and gender order in American superhero comic books has been firmly established over the 100-year life span of the genre. This places *Kwezi* at an interesting intersection between the superhero comic book genre and its South African context.

Kwezi exists within a country that has a strong male gender order and racialized colonial order. These orders are the basis for the constructions of many forms of masculinity in South Africa (Morrell, 1998, pp. 605-607). Although there are multiple masculinities that exist within the racialised hierarchy, all these masculinities benefit from patriarchal privilege (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 215; Quijano, 1993, p. 170; Morrell, 2002). Besides the prevailing white masculinity – a result of the Apartheid regime – black masculinity has been split into competing groups such as young versus old and urban versus traditional (Morrell, 1998; Morrell, 2001). These masculinities are now in competition with one another among the masculine hierarchy (Wood & Jewkes, 2001; Morrell, 1998). Although the post-1994 democratic South African government no longer discriminates according to race, the scars of the Apartheid hegemonic masculinity remain and have contributed to the rise of gender-based violence in the country, as well as the creation of the masculinist gender order that exists today (Morrell, 2001; Morrell, 2002; Wood & Jewkes, 2001). It is clear that this context has contributed to the construction of Kwezi's masculinity within the comic book and is clear in the design of the character.

I set out to do an ideological analysis of the construction of Kwezi's masculinity in the superhero comic, *Kwezi*. To do so I conducted a thematic analysis of the comic's current

issues (1-12) to select a sample story arc on which I would conduct my analysis. This analysis led me to choose the story arc in which Kwezi goes to a mountainous island. I made this choice because of the story arc's connection to the cultural Xhosa male initiation ceremony in which boys become men. This connection made the meanings embedded in the story arc connect well with the construction of Kwezi's masculinity as well as the superheroes' connection to maleness/being a man. The story arc was made up of seven sequences. I did a thematic analysis of each of these sequences and identified different themes of masculinity within each. This made it possible to rule out certain sequences for analysis if they showed duplicate themes to other sequences. The themes identified are: 1. progress and success in manhood, 2. physical strength, violence and emotionlessness, 3. representation of the male body and 4. the self-made man, authority and control. After this thematic analysis I chose sequences one, three, six and seven for analysis, which was conducted using visual social semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996) and Thompson's modes of operational ideology (Thompson, 1990) and narrative theory (Levi-Strauss, 1967; Propp, 1968; Todorov, 1981)

In sequences one and three Kwezi is systematically disempowered and verbally abused by the Shadow character. Each interaction between the Shadow and Kwezi emphasises Kwezi's flaws as a man (mostly identifying him as a boy). The result of these interactions is a clear identification of the qualities Kwezi lacks and therefore requires to progress towards his goal and regain his superpowers. The dominant masculinity (Morrell, 1998, p. 607) in these two sequences is constructed through the identification of the failures of the hero of the story and the construction of the antagonist character, the Shadow. The subordinate masculinity (embodied by Kwezi at the start of the story arc) is constructed as a boy that has no ambition or authority, who cannot overcome his obstacles and achieve success, he is also frail and not strong enough to progress towards his goal. The dominant masculinity (embodied by the Shadow at the start of the story arc) is constructed as successful, self-made, in control, violent, powerful and represented as having a muscular body. These themes continue to be built upon in sequences six and seven which are about Kwezi's rise to power and becoming a real superhero/man.

At the end of sequence seven, the conclusion of the story arc, there is a clear indication of the construction of the dominant masculinity in the comic which Kwezi has come to embody. This is evidenced by different binaries identified through Levi-Strauss' narrative theory

(Levi-Strauss, 1967) and a new equilibrium identified through Todorov's narrative theory (Todorov, 1981). By creating these binaries (power versus weakness, violence versus non-violence, urban versus traditional, self-made man versus boy, success versus failure, and muscular versus frail) and favouring certain sides of the binaries in the establishment of the new equilibrium at the conclusion of the story arc, Kwezi comes to embody certain elements that construct a dominant masculinity. Furthermore, at the end of the story arc the Shadow (as the antagonist) embodies the less desirable elements of masculinity identified in the binaries. Kwezi is constructed by these elements of the binaries: power, violence, muscular, success, urban and self-made; while the Shadow is constructed by these elements of the binary: weakness, traditional, failure, frail, non-violence. The elements Kwezi embodies are clearly the preferred construction of masculinity within the comic as he is the protagonist/hero and so is identified as the aspirational character in the story (Prinsloo, 2009, pp. 224-225).

Mkize has created a South African superhero for the young black superhero comic book fan (Smit, 2018; Wright, 2018). However, in his attempt to make Kwezi the poster child for South African superheroes he fails to do anything new regarding to the construction of masculinity within the genre (Stevens, 2015; Brown, 1999; De Dauw, 2018; Klein, 2007; Wright, 2018). In doing so *Kwezi* follows Hall's understanding about the reclamation of black subjects within popular culture (Hall, 1997, pp. 272-274; Brown, 1999) which says that in the process of representing the black subject more positively, they will go on to be represented in the current regimes of representation. In Mkize's attempt to create a black South African superhero he has reproduced Kwezi within the current regimes of representation of masculinity found in the superhero comic book genre and South African masculinist genre order. This reflects the internalisation and normalisation of ideology in the subject identified by Althusser (Hall, 1983). This is also in line the complex nature of African popular culture and the multiplicity of meanings imbedded into African popular cultural artefacts (Spencer, et al., 2018, p. 4 & 8). Furthermore, *Kwezi*, reflects the sentiment expressed by Coetzee (2016, p. 243), which states that African superheroes reflect the complexity of the African lived experience and would there for be messy and contradictory. The masculinity Kwezi comes to embody is the physically strong and muscular, violent and emotionless, self-made man who is in control and confronts all obstacles no matter what they might be. Therefore, Kwezi comfortably fits within the dominant masculinist gender order within South Africa, as well as the American superhero genre as a whole.

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Appendix A

Synopsis of the comic *Kwezi* to date

Collector's edition 1: Issue 1, 2, 3

Millions of years ago, when man was at the brink of destruction a star appeared in the sky. This star bestowed power on the chosen of humanity, and these children of the star were to lead humanity back to greatness. When their work was done, the star and its chosen gradually disappeared as their story faded into legend and mystery. But three months ago, the star reappeared and with it the long-forgotten prophecy of the star people's return. Kwezi is one of these star children. Kwezi is a young, disaffected black man living alone on the outskirts of Gold City who discovers he has superpowers. He begins his journey as a self-serving narcissist who only uses his abilities to further his social status. He continues with his obsession with fame, money and women until his lifestyle is interrupted by a team of would-be superheroes. After being tracked down by their leader, the elder Basotho man Mohau, Kwezi refuses to join them. After a brief chase and brawl, Mohau's team mates, the Zulu woman Azania and the Khoisan man Khoi capture Kwezi. Mohau, Azania and Khoi all exhibit their own superpowers. After being taken down by an arrow from Khoi that removes his powers, Kwezi is taken back to the team's secret base, a temple in the Drakensberg Mountains. It is there that Kwezi is confronted with the truth about his powers and the prophecy he is meant to fulfil as the chosen one of the star people. Near the end of the 3rd issue Kwezi is faced with a decision either to carry on his life of serving self-interest, or to join his new companions on a journey to discover who he really is and the hero he is destined to be. We also meet the villain, the business tycoon Mpisi, for the first time and find out that he has some a plan that could be a problem for the heroes. His motives seem ambiguous, but he is attempting to incite mistrust of Kwezi and any superheroes in the public. Surprisingly he too exhibits supernatural power as he turns into a hulking bipedal hyena.

Collector's edition 2: Issue 4, 5, 6

The still powerless Kwezi continues his journey as he leaves the temple base carried by Azania as they fly to reunite with his family in Langelihle, Eastern Cape. On their way to Langelihle, Kwezi regains his powers and steals an unwanted kiss from Azania. Soon after returning home Kwezi has a confrontation with his parents and a fallout with Azania about his purpose and the prophecy. He then discovers he must undertake a sacred mission to a mountainous island where he will gain even more power and transform into the superhero he

is meant to be. Kwezi commits himself to the sacred mission and after finding the mountainous island, and getting close to its shore, mysteriously loses his powers again. Kwezi needs to rely on more than his superpowers to take on the challenges of the island. He must struggle not only against nature to reach his goal at the pinnacle of the mountain, but also a mysterious figure who has set out to stop him at all costs. After much struggle and a couple of physical confrontations, Kwezi finds himself at the top of the mountain. It is there that he has a meaningful realisation about his responsibility, punches a whole in the wall of the inner sanctum that sits at the summit of the mountain and proceeds to regain his powers, and a new black and gold suit. Meanwhile in the Namib Desert, *en route* to seeking the counsel of a Seer about the unravelling prophecy, Mohau and Khoi encounter the Three Pillars. These are inter-dimensional beings responsible for guarding the Seer, who sits safely in another dimension. After a brief scuffle these beings bring Mohau and Khoi to the Seer who offers them advice about the prophecy of the star people and Kwezi and bestows more power on each of them. Back in Gold City, something sinister is quietly brewing in the plans of the vicious Mr. Mpisi.

Collector's edition 3: Issue 7, 8, 9

While Kwezi, Mohau and Khoi are away on their separate missions, Gold city is left vulnerable to the machinations of the villainous Mpisi who has set in motion a plan to undo the rise of Kwezi and the children of the star. Using his vast wealth, political connections and shear malice, Mpisi has constructed an underground facility in which he tortures and experiments on the progressively growing number of emerging supers (people who are developing superpowers due to the emergence of the star). These supers are just tools to Mpisi, and his nebulous plans set against Kwezi and his team. Mpisi's plan continues to unfold as he unleashes the gigantic Mamadou on Gold city. Mamadou is one of Mpisi's captured supers whose superpower allows him to grow from a normal man into a hulking giant, and Azania is the only one left to stop him. After a prolonged battle that begins to take its toll on the city, Mpisi and his small personal army interrupt Azania and Mamadou's battle. Mpisi claims to have come to stop the supers from destroying the city and endangering its people. This is part of his plan to set himself up as a saviour and the supers as the 'bad guys'. Mpisi and his team begin to open fire on Azania and Mamadou who fight back. This does not last long as Kwezi returns to save Azania and defeat and capture Mamadou along with the help of the newly empowered Mohau and Khoi. The team take the now normal-sized

Mamadou back to their temple hideout and discover that Mpisi forced Mamadou to attack Gold City by kidnapping and threatening his family.

Collector's edition 4: Issue 10, 11, 12

Kwezi and his team continue to work for the good of Gold City, trying to stop crime and save lives, while simultaneously assisting their new friend Mamadou to find his kidnapped family. Meanwhile Mpisi continues to develop his anti-superhero plans in his attempt to put a stop to Kwezi and his team, and it seems to be working as he continues to foster hatred of the superheroes in the public. After Khoi discovers a convoy carrying Mamadou's family in the desert, Kwezi and his team engage a newly formed supervillain group who works for Mpisi, and battle to save Mamadou's family and a group of imprisoned villagers. However, this is a distraction to keep Kwezi and his team from discovering both Mpisi's anti-super plans and his underground experimental bunker housing dozens of captured supers as well as special artefacts. Just when Kwezi and his team begin to have the upper hand, Mpisi releases a super called Hiroshima that explodes in a nuclear blast. Although Azania attempts to shield everyone with her telekinetic powers, she only manages to protect Kwezi, Mohau, Khoi and herself. Everyone else dies. Angered by this Kwezi flies off to confront Mpisi who lures him into putting Mpisi's life in danger in front of an anti-super crowd of protestors, further solidifying Mpisi's anti-super plan. Following this mistake and surrounded by the hateful cries of the crowd, Kwezi and the team retreat to their temple to lick their wounds and discuss their future. Meanwhile one of Mpisi's henchmen turns out to be more than he appears as he dons the artefacts (now discovered to be armour) and becomes Nerus, the God-king of the star children that ruled the world in the distant past.

Appendix B

Thematic analysis identifying themes dealing with the construction of masculinity within *Kwezi* to identify the story arc selected for analysis.

1. **Male relationship with authority/Superheroes and authority**
   - First encounter with the police (Issue 1-3)
   - Encounter with Mohau (Issue 1-3)
   - Kwezi's father reiterates his role as the chosen one. Kwezi is resistant. (4-6)
   - Guidance given by father (4-6)
   - Separation between superheroes and authority of the government by villain. (10-12)
   - Subversion of police power. (10-12)
   - Kwezi taking power into his own hands after Hiroshima explodes and kills the villagers. (10-12)

2. **Theme: Physical violence and physical prowess**
   - Language of the jungle, hunt or be hunted. (1-3)
   - First introduction to Kwezi. (1-3)
   - Meeting of words with Mohau didn't work so then it escalates to violence between Khoi, Azania and Kwezi. (1-3)
   - Language of the jungle repeated with even more violence (villain kills so he is worse). (1-3)
   - Meeting of the guardians = violent response by Khoi (i.e. no talking). (4-6)
   - First encounter with Shadow takes 4 frames to get to violence. (4-6)
   - Power shift between Kwezi and his shadow (Kwezi's loss of powers). (4-6)
   - Bound by vines, interesting power relation between Kwezi and shadow. (4-6)
   - Violent breakthrough (through wall and attacking of shadow) representative of his progress and stepping into his calling. (4-6)
   - Explosion of shadow after realization. (4-6)
   - Constant conflict throughout these issues. (7-9)
   - Witchcraft related only to Azania. Giant calls her a "witch". (7-9)
   - Azania is the only one seen to save others. Woman's caring side. (7-9)
   - Kwezi arrives, violently defeating the Giant and restoring 'balance' by saving Azania. (7-9)
   - Restraining of giant and removal of powers. (7-9)
   - Kwezi wants to immediately confront the villains with force. Kwezi solution to the new threat is violence. (7-9)
   - The fight takes up almost the whole last book. (10-12)
   - Giant can only save his family through his powers and violence. (10-12)
   - Villains are condemned because of their fatal violent actions. Versus justified violence of the heroes. (10-12)
   - Kwezi's physical and violent approach implicates him. (10-12)

3. **Theme: Power over women/Women are inadequate**
   - Superpowers = popularity = getting girls (Objectification). (1-3)
   - Concern of female friend overlooked by Zane. (1-3)
   - Denial of Azania's ability to be the prophesied one. (1-3)

- Stolen kiss sets right the power difference between Kwezi and Azania. (1-3)
- Azania's continued obsession with becoming the chosen one. Tries to prove through violence. (7-9)
- Azania thanking Kwezi for saving her and moving to apologise. (7-9)
- Again, Mohau and Khoi are the ones to take the giant down not Azania. (7-9)

4. **Theme: The male and female body/representation of men and women**
    - Meeting Kwezi. (1-3)
    - Meeting Mohau (1-3)
    - End of issue 2 (last page) example of bodies of superhero team. (1-3)
    - Majority men in issue 1 and 2. (1-3)
    - Azania as angry black woman. (1-3)
    - Azania's annoyance is connected to her inability to be in a relationship. (1-3)
    - Representation of the shadow Kwezi (power pose). (4-6)
    - Power switch between Kwezi and shadow. The change in Kwezi's body. Noticeably more muscular. Shirt even seems tighter. (4-6)
    - Removal of modern clothes replaced with suite. Skin tight suite that highlights muscles (nakedness). (4-6)
    - Usage of light in this scene seems divine/good. Kwezi as the chosen one is seen as a responsibility (for a man) not for a woman. (4-6)
    - Seers body. (4-6)
    - Kwezi now goes to save Azania. (4-6)
    - Scientists body vs the villain's body. (7-9)
    - Giants body (huge and muscular as a superhero). When he is normal and when he is a big. (7-9)
    - Close ups on Azania's body, skin tight suite. Also vectors that point to places. (7-9)
    - Skin tight musclebound bodies for all of them. Som G (celebrity) and his clothes and language. Obsession with stuff. Also, his language during the Giant attack. Even comments on Azania's boots. (7-9)
    - Language of giant: "face me like a man" just before Azania arrives to fight him. (7-9)
    - All male villain army shows up with big muscles and big guns. (7-9)
    - How small the giant looks in the last sequence? (7-9)
    - Bodies of the heroes arriving from above to stop the bank robbery. (10-12)
    - Azania's body throughout the fight. Accentuating her breasts and legs. (10-12)
    - Female villain. (10-12)
    - Giants body in desert fight. (10-12)
    - The villain team's bodies all fit the norm. Black eyes of Mpisi on occasion. (10-12)
    - Mpisi's body seems to change from super muscular to more fat and less imposing. (10-12)
    - Kwezi is defeated outside and shown without his suit. (10-12)
    - New main villain body – overly muscular, light like Kwezi's. (10-12)
    - Last page, bodies of characters all conform to overly muscular standard. (10-12)
    - Side-kick is only present for narrative purposes and has a significantly less muscular body. (10-12)
    - Confrontation between Kwezi and Azania continues. (10-12)

- Villain as a corporate, modern person. (10-12)
- Azania's body when she is hit. (10-12)
- Scientist versus new villain. Same, small frail body. (10-12)

5. **Theme: Woman power of over men**
   - Disruption of power over women when Kwezi loses to Azania. But Azania is not the one to bring him down, Mohau and Khoi are. (1-3)
   - Azania carrying Kwezi when he doesn't have powers. (1-3)
   - Kwezi cannot stand being carried by Azania so much that he would endanger his life. (1-3)

6. **Theme: Power and progress and regaining manhood/ link between manhood and purpose/achieving/success**
   - Kwezi's need to constantly keep moving and his obsession with regaining his powers. (4-6)
   - Kwezi constantly curtailed because he has lost his powers. Sense that he needs to earn them back. This links to his manhood. (4-6)
   - Kwezi constantly belittled for not living up to the manhood standard. (4-6)
   - Violent breakthrough (through wall and attacking of shadow) representative of his progress and stepping into his calling. (4-6)
   - Kwezi is less because he is told what to do and doesn't know who he is. (4-6)
   - Swallowed up by the earth because that is where he belongs. Not on top of the mountain. Success and manhood. (4-6)
   - Kwezi, by virtue of being a man and a chosen one, must just get on with it despite his struggles (visually through he takes physical action). (4-6)

7. **Theme: Men and responsibility/ Desire to be acknowledged**
   - Giant's responsibility to protect his family. Almost castrated because he 'failed'. (10-12)
   - Kwezi's obsession to be acknowledged by the public. (10-12)
   - Azania's incapable of saving everyone (except the team). Only her failure is highlighted, not that of the men. (10-12)
   - Kwezi's main issue with not being acknowledged by the public is equated to be a loser. (10-12)

Appendix C

These are the scanned images of the panels and sequences selected for analysis. The panels selected for analysis have been highlighted and numbered for convenience.

Sequence One

Figure 1: panels 1, 3, 4 and 5 of sequence one

Figure 2: panels 8, 9, 10, 11 of sequence one

Sequence Three

Figure 3: panels 8, 9, 10 and 11 of sequence three

Sequence Six

Figure 4: panels 1 and 2 of sequence six

Figure 5: panels 3 and 5 of sequence six

Sequence Seven

Figure 6: panels 1, 2, 3, 4

Figure 7: panels 9 and 14 of sequence seven

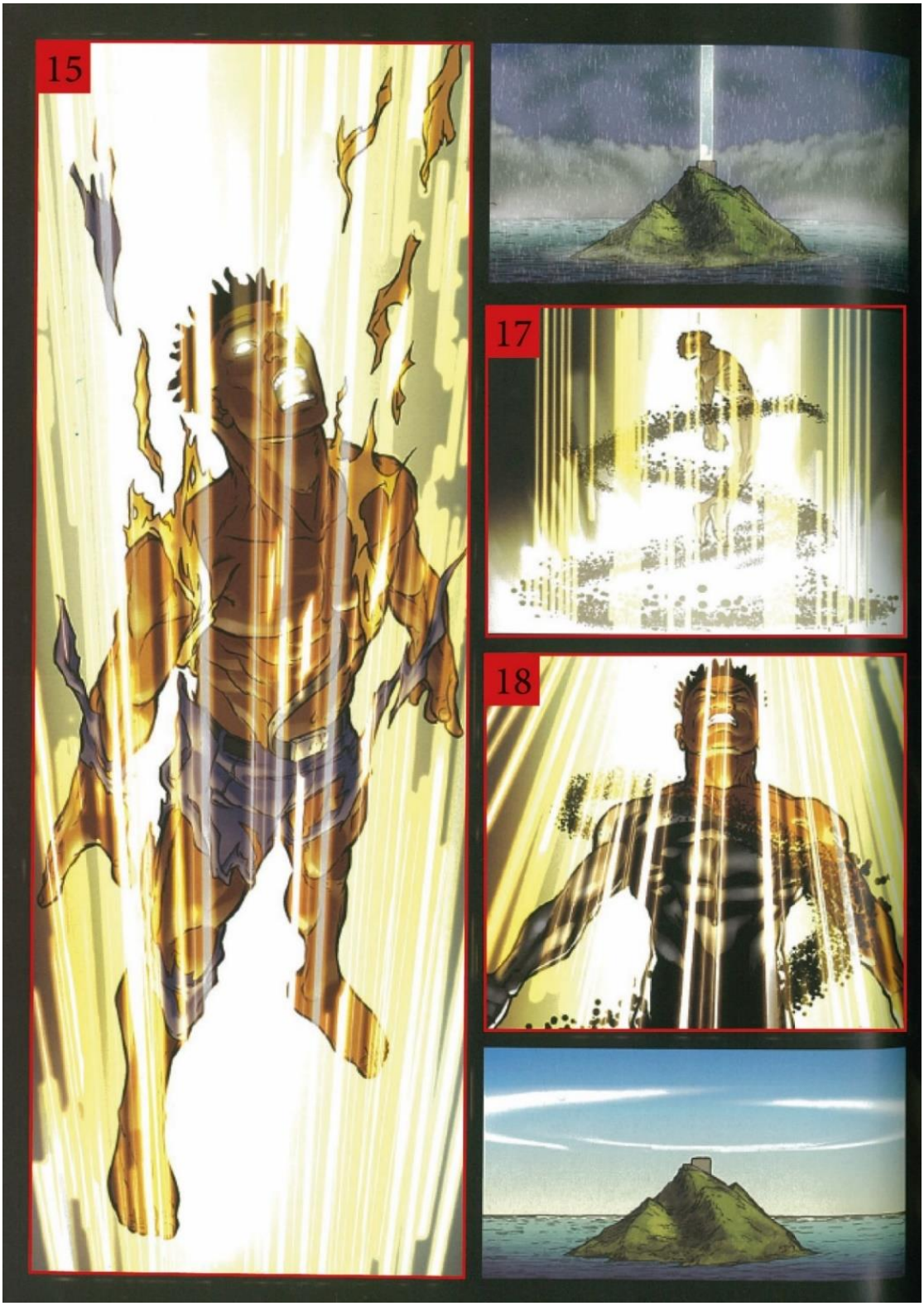

Figure 8: panels 15, 17, 18 of sequence seven

Figure 9: panel 21 of sequence seven

Figure 10: panels 23, 25, 26 of sequence seven

Figure 11: panel 30 of sequence seven

Appendix D

Comic book Glossary

Comic book
A generic term applied to magazine-like books of varying length that combine story and art. Defined by the term sequential art, as described by Will Eisner.

Sequential art
A sequence of two or more images causes the images to transform into something more than just pictures: they become the "art of comics". McCloud describes comics as pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer.

Inker
The artist that applies black ink onto the initial pencilled artwork of the comic. This process can be digitally done on a computer, as opposed to manually applying the ink to the page. This process adds additional details, depth, and shadows to the artwork.

Letterer
The letterer takes the language of the script and incorporates it into the speech and thought bubbles, captions, and sound effects on each page. This process follows a specific set of rules to ensure the page is readable and easy to understand/follow. This is usually done close to the end of the production of comic.

Writer
The writer creates the script from which the other parts of the team (penciler, inker, letterer, colourist) will work. This involves writing out the story, dialogue, and sound effects as well as suggesting the structure of the comic, such as panels per page and caption size. This is the initial foundation of the comic book.

Colourist
This artist applies colour to the comic, usually after the inker has completed their work. This process can be done either manually with coloured inks or digitally on a computer.

Editor
The editor is responsible for overseeing the comic creation process and making sure the product is ready before it goes to the printers. This entails spell and grammar checks, checking for continuity in the story and art, as well as making sure the comic conforms to the format for the printers. The editor also often liaises with the publishers.

Panel/Frame
This can simply be referred to as the 'boxes' on the comic book page. These squares or rectangles, often surrounded by a borderline, frame the action/story of the comic book. The placement and construction of these panels, as well as what happens inside them, indicate things like time and movement, and affects how the reader interprets the story. The layout of the panels on the page also affects the reading order of the panels and affects how the reader's eyes travel across the page. In order to fully understand the story, a reader needs to be cued into the sequence in which the panels must be read.

Sequence of panels
This is a grouping of panels in a particular order regarding to the story of a comic. The reader can tell these panels are in sequence through the five choices mentioned by Scott McCloud in *Making Comics*: moment, frame, image, word and flow.

Written Text
This refers to the actual letters, words and sentences that are within the pages of the comic and is the result of the work of the writer and letterer.

Image
This refers to the artwork in the comic, within panels and on splash pages and double page spreads, which is produced by the penciler, inker, colourist and editor.

Gutter
This is the space between the panels on the page. The size of the gutter can assist in readability. For example, making the vertical gutter thinner that the horizontal gutter can encourage readers to group rows of panels together for reading.

Caption
These are separate boxes of text, visually demarcated from other forms of text like speech or thought bubbles. Captions are used either to establish the context or setting of the story (usually at the start of the comic), or to introduce new story elements or transitions. More recently captions have also been used to convey either the voice of the narrator or even the internal monologue of the protagonist.

Speech bubble and Thought bubble (Or word/thought balloon)
Speech bubbles surround the dialogue belonging to a certain character. There is usually an indicator stretching out from the bubble towards the character that the speech belongs to. The speech bubble is usually a white oval shape outlined in black. The thought bubble is similar except it indicates the character's inner thoughts. The difference is indicated in the style of the bubble which takes the form of a cloud with the indicator being small circles emanating from the character. Different types of speech can be indicated through the style of the bubble, for example shouting could be indicated by a sharp star like speech bubble, or whispers could be indicated by a dotted line surrounding the speech bubble.

Splash Page
This refers to a page in the comic that is not broken up into many panels with gutters, but rather the page is a single panel where the art takes up the entire page. This often is used to introduce the story or capture the reader's attention.

Story arc
This is an extended or continuing storyline ongoing throughout many issues of a comic. These story arcs often have their own title with each issue being chapters of the story.

Double page spread
Similar to a splash page but takes up two facing pages of the comic.

Off-Panel
This refers to events that happen between the comic panels that the readers don't see. It is the equivalent of the movie term 'off-screen'.

Sound effects/Onomatopoeia
These are the sound effects illustrated in the comic. They are often illustrated differently depending on the sound and what effect the artist is trying to convey. For example, an explosion would be illustrated in large text as BOOM with bright orange and yellow colours to reinforce the image of the explosion.

Resources

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