

POST-APARTHEID NOSTALGIA AND THE FUTURE OF THE BLACK VISUAL ARCHIVE

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Of

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By

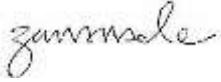
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DECLARATION

This thesis is my own original work and has not been submitted in part, or in full, for any degree or examination at any other university. It contains no material previously published or written by other individuals, except where due reference is made and/or acknowledgements are provided in the text. This thesis is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Art History at Rhodes University, South Africa.

Signature: 

Date: 14 February 2020

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to the long line of ancestors who have come before me, and my beloved family members who have recently passed.

My father Thamsanqa Nsele

My maternal grandparents Irene Mgaga Mnculwane and Raymoth Mnculwane

My paternal grandparents Qoqekile Mwandla Nsele and Nicholas Nsele

My maternal aunts Ntombifuthi Mnculwane and Nomusa Mnculwane

My paternal uncle Mlox Nsele and aunt Thandi Nsele

My cousin Pule Mnculwane

I further dedicate this thesis to my nieces and nephews and the future generation of Nseles and Mnculwanes

Makwande!

ABSTRACT

The implications of nostalgia often strike a discordant note in post-apartheid discourse and this has opened up critical possibilities for research scholarship. For instance, Jacob Dlamini's memoir *Native Nostalgia* entered the discursive fray in 2009, and it was subsequently followed by Derek Hook's psychoanalytical approach in *(Post) apartheid Conditions: Psychoanalysis and Social Formation* in 2014. Notably, there is not yet a sustained and intensive research focus that has been conducted on post-apartheid forms of nostalgia within the discipline of art history and visual culture. I present this dissertation as a response to this gap.

This thesis identifies mainly two competing nostalgias in post-apartheid South Africa. Through the analysis of selected artwork and media imagery, this dissertation critiques the connections of these nostalgias to the representation of the black figure in post-apartheid visual culture and the implications thereof. I argue that nostalgias for an apartheid-colonial-imperialist past operate through erasure and in the sanitisation of memory and as a result they render suffering indiscernible or in a sadomasochistic way consumes suffering as enjoyable. This thesis simultaneously critiques art work and visual representation that responds to South Africa's nostalgia for the future: a restorative nostalgia that has emerged in the form of "rainbow nationalism". This is a form of nostalgia that is underpinned by a dogged commitment to triumphalism and as a result erases the ongoing scenes of abjection.

I use nostalgia and Afropessimism as analytical frameworks to argue that both real and visual representational forces work in tandem to restrain the future and this, I suggest is fulfilled by the transference of the black body from one state of unfreedom to next, resonating with a cyclical pattern. Frantz Fanon's (1967) *Black Skin White Mask* forms the conceptual bedrock of my study, particularly his visual layout of "negrophobogenesis" and colonial temporality, which

he describes as a “hellish cycle” or as an “infernal cycle” wherein the past overwhelms the present and ideas of the future.

Key words: Nostalgias, Archival Art Practice, Restorative Nostalgia, Rainbowism, Post-Apartheid Visual Culture, antiblackness and Afropessimism

NOTES ON TERMINOLOGY

Black people

Although the category of Black is wide in scope and reach, in this thesis I use this term to denote Africans and their descendants that live on the African continent and in the diaspora.

Blackness

This thesis is led by the definition and version of Blackness that is overdetermined by the “phobogenic imago” (Fanon 1967, 2008). From this vantage point, Blackness is founded upon and shaped by the historical processes of Arab slavery in Africa, middle passage racial slavery, colonial settler modernity and apartheid

Antiblackness

According to Gordon (1995), “the first premise of the antiblack world is that white people are superior to black people”. In this thesis, I use the term antiblackness in the form that it is iterated in Lewis Gordon’s (1995) *Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism*. From this perspective, antiblackness is a global and world making paradigm that organizes human beings along a hierarchy of visual metaphors, from the most light spiralling down to the most dark, where being dark is seen and read as a marker of lack and inferiority.

Post-Apartheid

The “Post” of post-apartheid chronologically denotes the common sense linear understanding that Apartheid began and then ended. In other words this understanding suggests that there is a decisive break or closure between the now and then or the before and after of apartheid. This thesis thinks of the signifier “post” alongside Saidiya Hartman’s (1997) idea of the “afterlife”, which enables

one to capture the simultaneous overlapping continuities and discontinuities of settler colonial power.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCING POST-APARTHEID

NOSTALGIAS

1. CONTEXT OF STUDY

South Africa has a recent past and a modern character that is shaped by three intersecting forms of oppression: slavery, colonialism and apartheid. Images circulating in contemporary South Africa belie the linear narrative of progress held by the dominant ideology of Rainbowism¹ in which apartheid at one point reigned and then ended. Considering that nostalgia is a condition that typically conjures images of a time in the past “when everything was good”² then it follows that the question of nostalgia is a problematic one. The unrelenting persistence of nostalgia and its problematic nature³ are precisely what make it compelling as an area of study in art history and visual culture. In various literature, nostalgia is described as a phenomenon that derives from Europe. The term ‘nostalgia’ is considered a pseudo Greek word coined by the Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer in his medical dissertation in 1688 (Boym 2001:3). The scholarly work of Svetlana Boym (2001) *The Future of Nostalgia*, Linda Hutcheon and Mario J. Alves’s (2000) dialogue *Nostalgia, Irony and Postmodernism*, and Janelle Wilson’s (2014) *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of*

¹ Rainbowism is also more formally known as rainbow nationalism, this is a Desmond Tutu and a Nelson Mandela led nation-building project that came about after South Africa’s first democratic elections in 1994. According Gary Baines (1998:1) Archbishop Desmond Tutu is credited with coining up with the phrase ‘the rainbow nation’. In the public imagination Tutu’s position as a religious figure sanctified his role as a national unifier when he was the chairperson of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee. He even appeared on television describing South Africans as the ‘Rainbow People of God’ evoking a biblical old testament story, where the rainbow symbolized the forgiveness of humankind. The exclusion of Black people from the national body politic during apartheid meant that 1994 would mark their first inclusion as South Africans officially. The selection of artists in this thesis is informed by the theme of a post-apartheid black citizenship in relation to a new state sanctioned rainbowist national identity. By selecting the work of artists such as Bogosi Sekhukhuni, Gerald Machona and *I See a Different You*, I aim to excavate the experience of a new citizenship experienced by the black populace in South Africa, as the work of these artists visually references that theme. Apartheid South Africa is a where Black people where positioned as non-citizens hence they carried passports, as ‘foreigners’. I focus on these artists as they enable me to speak about these particular experiences of alienation and an impaired citizenship even in post-1994 South Africa. I use their selected work to not only critique the limitations of a “new myth” and a “new nostalgia” for a post-racial future but I depend on their images in order to expose the figure of the black outsider that through the afrophobic attacks continue to haunt the new myth of a post-racial body politic. It is worth mentioning that the work of the artist Candice Breitz’s *Rainbow Series* also references rainbowism, however this work has already been critically engaged in earlier art criticism by Okwui Enwezor (1997) see his essay ‘Reframing the Black Subject: Ideology and Representation in Contemporary South African Representation’ which I discuss in this chapter.

² See Janelle Wilson’s (2014) book, *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning*, where she provides an in-depth study on the changing meaning of nostalgia.

³ See Dirk Kloppe’s (2016:9) essay “The Problem of Nostalgia”. In this essay, Kloppe outlines the various ways that nostalgia emerges in contemporary South African literature.

Meaning and in Fred Davis's (1979) *Yearning for Nostalgia* to name a few, trace nostalgia as a pseudo Greek word coined by Hofer.

In the 17th century Swiss doctors treated nostalgia as a curable disease, whose symptoms could be relieved by an intake of opium and the application of leeches (Boym 2001: xiv). By the 21st century, nostalgia is regarded more as a modern condition attributed to modern technological progress (Wilson 2014:21). For instance, nostalgia has an assertive influence across popular culture from cinema to social media platforms such as Instagram; technological advances in the production of the camera and its special effects, all have enabled the recreation of visions of the past (Boym 2001: xiv). This suggests that progress does not halt the sentiment of nostalgia, but on the contrary, technological progress exacerbates it (Boym 2001: vie). In this thesis, I deploy the notion of nostalgia as a 'structure of feeling' that in part is characterised by a fixation with images of the past, as I believe this is one of the ways in which forms of nostalgia are manifested in contemporary visual culture (Williams 1977). In *Marxism and Literature*, the cultural theorist Raymond Williams (1977:129) coins the term 'structures of feeling' to refer to something burgeoning, a phenomenon that may not yet be fully formed in a full-blown and obvious way. Williams (1977) uses the term 'feeling' rather than thought, in order to signal a relationship between affect and culture. In other words; 'structures of feeling' refer to thoughts that are felt and implied yet not explicitly named in a cerebral way. Raymond Williams further explains:

We are talking about ... elements of consciousness and relationships: not feelings against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought. We are then defining these elements as a structure: as a set, with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension. Yet we are also defining a social experience which is still in process, often indeed not recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic and even isolating, but which in analysis (though rarely otherwise) has its emergent, connecting and dominant characteristics indeed its specific hierarchies. These are more recognizable at a later stage, when they have been formalized, classified and built into institutions and formations (Williams 1977: 132).

It is with this process in mind that I believe nostalgia operates along an affective dimension, as a structure of feeling in South African art and visual culture. By this I mean that forms of nostalgia are manifested both in vague and in coherent ways in post-apartheid cultural production. This thesis focuses on the competing nostalgias that take a discernible shape in the post-1994 post-apartheid process, as South Africa forges towards a new collective identity as “the new South Africa”. This is not to say that there were no collective nostalgias prior to 1994. The full spectrum of the visual trajectory of these nostalgic memoryscapes and memory images span over centuries and they are too large in scope to cover and do justice to within a single doctoral study; that is not the purpose of this study. This thesis is interested in artists in the post-apartheid context that use images from the past. It is interested in the nostalgia that are reignited and triggered in the aftermath of apartheid. These are two forms of nostalgia⁴ that I believe emerge with the memory crisis accompanying the formal end of apartheid. The sociologist Martin J. Murray identifies this memory crisis in his book *Commemorating and Forgetting: Challenges for the New South Africa*. Further, in *(Post)Apartheid Conditions*, Derek Hook (2013) makes a compelling argument for a nostalgic turn prevalent in post-apartheid South African culture in his chapter “Screened History: Nostalgia as Defensive Formation” which is invaluable to my own study. While Hook reads nostalgia through Lacanian psychoanalysis, this thesis leans towards a Fanonian analysis in its reading of nostalgia’s visual manifestations. Furthermore, in *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym (2001: xvi) likewise points out that outbreaks of nostalgia usually occur during historical processes that are considered to be radical breaks in history. She identifies forms of nostalgia that follow the formal dismantling of the Soviet Union:

The end of the Soviet Union produced an image of the last Soviet decades as a time of stagnation or alternatively as a Soviet golden age of stability, strength and “normalcy,” the view prevalent in Russia today

⁴ Please note that unless specified, I use the term ‘nostalgia’ in the plural sense

Moreover, within the disciplinary schema of post-apartheid art writing in South Africa subsequent to the legal dismantling of apartheid, Okwui Enwezor's essay "Reframing the Black Subject : Ideology and Fantasy in Contemporary South African Representation" published in 1996 is both timely and authoritative. Enwezor's (1996) essay is arguably the earliest discernment of what this thesis considers to be the burgeoning 'structure of feeling' of post-apartheid nostalgia in South African art production. In the essay, Enwezor identifies the beginnings of a nostalgic affective structure taking shape in South African art and public visual culture, he recognizes a nostalgia that longs for and sentimentalises abject docile bodies of Africans (Enwezor 1997:383). More pertinently, Enwezor solidifies an important point about the timeliness of this retrospective nostalgia that emerges in the aftermath of apartheid. This a defiant nostalgia that cleanses the past of its racial terror and Enwezor (1997:377) describes it:

nothing new or unique as it has companions of the fascist revivalism that has engulfed Europe in the aftermath of the Cold War with the return of swastikas and Nazi symbolism and it the more enduring history of the Confederacy flag in the Southern United States

In this thesis, I use the term post-apartheid nostalgias to speak collectively about the two competing yet not mutually exclusive types of nostalgias that I examine in the selected visual representation. The first type of nostalgia is *retrospective* in its sanitisation of the apartheid past and it is associated with subjective individual longings. The second type of nostalgia is *prospective*, and it is a *restorative* nostalgia that is composed of a collective longing for a better future. In this thesis, I argue that this form of a nostalgia for the future underpins the affective structure of rainbow nationalism. This thesis is interested in how post-apartheid cultural practice is saturated by retrospective and restorative types of nostalgias that sentimentalize the past through a disavowal of a violence against the black body; a violence that shapes colonial and imperial histories. This violence is reproduced symbolically and figuratively through racist visual tropes, which are reproduced in part because they are normalised and legible to the public.

1.1 RESEARCH QUESTION AND OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

Through the selection of artwork and selected media images, the goal of this study is to bring to the surface and critique the visual representations of nostalgia in post-apartheid contemporary art and visual culture. I undertake my critique with the use of a range of academic texts and chief amongst them is the work of the Russian writer Svetlana Boym's (2001) *The Future of Nostalgia*. Boym's definition and study of nostalgia has a scope and method that I use in relation to the argument I present in this thesis. Boym (2001: xiii) divides the term nostalgia into two components; "*nostos*—return home, and *algia*—longing" thus, in this framework nostalgia becomes primarily a longing for a lost home that no longer exists or that has never existed. Following Boym's (ibid.) definition, nostalgia is distinctively a sentiment characterised by loss and displacement, "but also a romance with one's own fantasy", (Boym 2001: xvi). This is a sentiment that flowers under the particular conditions of what is perceived as political and historical change. This explains why Boym's study is rooted in the nostalgia that emerged following the fall of the Soviet union, which she believes has produced the image of the Soviet Union as a golden age: a view that is still prevalent in Russia today (2001:xvi).

Boym's outlook does not limit nostalgia to individual sentiment but it also considers the ways that it expresses the "biography of nations" and collective memory (Boym 2001: xvi). The nationalistic character of a restorative nostalgia is noteworthy as it permits me to adjust Boym's paradigm into the context of South Africa in order to read and analyse a new nationalism and a new mythologies of nationhood that emerge in post-1994 South Africa. Restorative nostalgia and the creation of nationalism and nationhood are inextricable in this case. In this thesis, I think through post-apartheid nationalist myth making through a constellation of selected imagery. More specifically, I primarily read the theme of nostalgia through archival art and media imagery. In this process, I shift Boym's nostalgia from its communist eastern European origins into a South African context, which by contrast is defined by a particular antiblack settler colonial modernity. The first move of

this shift presupposes that settler colonial modernity was in part founded upon the Anglo-Dutch union of South Africa in 1910 followed by the Afrikaner Apartheid nationalism. For example, Lubbe in (Palmer 2015: 63):

notes the drive to increase cohesion among white South Africans through the 1929 elections which then became known as the *Swart gevaar volksraadverliesing* [Black danger municipal election]. She, like other authors show how otherwise hostile white groups in South Africa – still with the memory of the Anglo Boer war fresh in their minds – could be united through the use of a sense of crisis and threat.

A solidarity amongst white people was equal to an organising around antiblackness and this strategy proved to be an efficient election winner, but more than that, the conjuring and normalization of ‘die swart gevaar’ *the black threat* also known as *the black peril* was overtly and covertly being woven into the character of South African nationalistic collective consciousness. In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson (1983:129) suggests that while nationhood inspires love and the creation of cultural products such as prose, art, images, museums and statues. Patriotism and racism are also the pathological characters of nationalism, as they are rooted in fear, threat and the hatred of ‘the other’. One can argue that ‘Die Swart Gevaar’ an Afrikaans term for ‘the black peril’ is a version of Frantz Fanon’s (1967) negrophobogenesis in the sense that it is evoked through philia and phobia. Negrophobogenesis refers to the phobic racialisation of the black body as a stimulus of anxiety and sadism (Marriott 2018:66). In antiblack social contexts, the black body can be instrumentalised as a depository of fears, threats, fantasies, aggression, it is seen as a body that is either violating or violated (Marriot 2018:71). In this thesis, I suggest that the threat to post-apartheid citizenship is the figure of the African (black) migrant. I state this while bearing in mind that class, gender and sexuality nuance this position of blackness. This viewpoint is not new nor is it exclusive to the South African context. In a paper ‘Migration Myths and Extreme Xenophobia in South Africa’ written by Jonathan Crush and Sujata Ramachandran (2015) they draw our attention to the clear connection between what I read as an

antiblack language and imagery used by the media during and after apartheid in order to identify and conjure the figure of the outsider:

Ironically, the language and imagery used by citizens to justify the exclusion of outsiders is heavily influenced by the idioms of apartheid, such as the repetitive use of the use of the term “influx control” by the respondents. The media and officialdom frequently resort to aquatic metaphors and imagery when describing “the threat” posed to the country as if migrant was a kind of extreme natural event. “Foreigners” do not enter or cross the borders into South Africa, they “flood” in “tidal waves” and “swamp” the country. Figure 4.4 neatly encapsulates the common belief that Africa is a sea of poverty, misery and chaos and that South Africa is a beacon of peace and prosperity that is in imminent danger of being submerged by its neighbours. (Crush and Ramachandran 2015:84)

Moreover, the language of social cohesion and nation building in post-apartheid South Africa has been argued to depend on this implied black threat. As noted by Ingrid Palmay (2015:65) “violence against African migrants is seen as an act of reconciliation and care”. The analysis presented in this thesis primarily enters through the language of imagery. Through the selection and analysis of art images in the work of the Zimbabwean artist Gerald Machona, this thesis argues that the state sanctioned Rainbow nationalism of post-racial 1994 carries with it an Afrophobic streak, a variant of ‘die swart gevaar’ that targets black migrants. By extension, this violence further exposes and spotlights the precarity and impaired citizenship of poor black people. In the post 1994 quest to create a new national feeling and a new national myth, statecraft excludes Blackness through overt and covert means. The imagined ‘other’ of national mythmaking formations remains the black figure as a foreigner.

Looking back, more than twenty years after the fall of apartheid there is a detectable ‘memory boom’ or a ‘memory crisis’ if one follows Martin Murray’s argument in

Commemorating and Forgetting (2013). The turn to memory and the mnemonic is prevalent in post-apartheid cultural discourse and production. The boom in memory discourse has taken the form of debate around the status of remembering in relation to past images. The discourse on memory and remembrance has also been evident in the vociferous public debates on the colonial toponymical landscape of post-apartheid South Africa and the renaming⁵ of places as a form of evoking and restoring local and indigenous memory. Annie Coombes's (2003) *History After Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa* is another notable text that examines the dilemmas faced by post-apartheid South Africa in negotiating the legacy of colonial and apartheid memory embedded in public museums and monuments in post-apartheid South Africa.

The "Rhodes Must Fall" movement that began in 2015 remains a watershed moment concerning the status of colonial memory in public monuments in South Africa. The act of throwing fecal matter on the Cecil John Rhodes statue at the University of Cape Town ignited the decolonisation stimulus in higher education institutions, but more significantly it brought to the fore the festering wounds inflicted by the dual legacy of apartheid and colonialism as embodied by public monuments and their concomitant memory practices. In contemporary art, the politics of memory have taken shape in the form of archival art⁶ visual practice, numerous South African artists and exhibitions in recent years have started to address the dual legacy of colonialism and apartheid by examining the colonial archive. One of the most notable of these engagements was *Imaginary Fact: Contemporary South African Art and the Archive*, an exhibition curated by

⁵ See Ndletyana's (2012) "Changing place names in post-apartheid South Africa: accounting for the Unevenness". In this article, Ndletyana (2012:90) discusses the post-apartheid process of transforming the colonial toponymic landscape of South Africa. Toponymy was used as a form of legitimating and naturalising colonial conquest. South Africa's toponymy is typified by a Eurocentric and racist place names that reflect the assumption that the natives lack a history worth celebrating or preserving. For instance, according to Ndletyana (2012:92) "many place names were derivatives of racial slurs such as kaffir, boesman and hotnot. Various derivatives of the racial slur kaffir alone numbered 418 in July 1994". Despite this Ndletyana argues that Black South Africans in post-apartheid South Africa have an ambivalent relationship with colonial memory and this ambivalence has played out in the manner that Black South Africans support and oppose the renaming colonial-apartheid place names. This ambivalence Ndletyana (2012:92) argues stems from the cautious and timid approach to renaming place names adopted by Mandela's administration after 1994 as an effort not to stifle reconciliatory efforts. Staunch critics of the renaming process are mainly white South Africans who are of the view that to indigenise and localise place-names is tantamount to stripping South Africa of its civilisation and a form of reverting to a barbaric state (2012:95).

⁶ "Archival art" is a term coined by Hal Foster (2004) in his essay, "An Archival Impulse". He uses this term to describe a genre of art practice that draws from the historical archive and past images more broadly.

Brenton Maart that was presented in the South African pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013. This exhibition is particularly noteworthy because it represents an instance when South African visual practitioners assemble on an international platform with the purpose of using the archived record in order to make sense of the contemporary post-apartheid moment.

Through creative engagements with the archive in the form of return, re-enactment and recuperation, artists often attempt to find new epistemological possibilities in forgotten pasts that remain in the apartheid-colonial archive (De Jong 2016). When visual artists engage with the archive, often the archive of their choice is of a visual type, which means that they are reanimating ‘past images’ or ‘memory images’ and in doing so, a set of aesthetic choices are implemented in order to make a critical statement about the past, present and the future. The argument I present in this thesis makes a case for nostalgia resulting from this aestheticizing and sanitising gestures with past-images. As Michael Kamen (in Boym 2001: xiv) suggests, “Nostalgia... is essentially history without guilt. Heritage is something that suffuses us with pride rather than with shame”. Therefore, in order to remember history from this lens, it would require a type of forgetting that evokes pride rather than shame, “an abdication of personal responsibility, a guilt-free homecoming, an ethical and aesthetic failure (Boym 2001: xvi). This thesis does not intend to make a moral judgement on the selected imagery, it is primarily analytic and descriptive, unveiling the visual implications of nostalgia rather than castigating and prescriptive.

Critiquing Rainbow Nationalism as Prospective Nostalgia

In this thesis, I follow Boym’s (2001) definition of nostalgia primarily because her use of nostalgia encompasses the two types of nostalgia; a retrospective type and prospective type of nostalgia.

Boym (2001) theorises nostalgia as both backward looking and forward looking; by this, she means that one can be nostalgic for the past and the future.

Nostalgia is not always about the past; it can be retrospective but also prospective. Fantasies of the past determined by the needs of the present have a direct impact on realities of the future...Unlike the melancholia which confines itself to individual consciousness, nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory (Boym:xvi)

Boym (2001: xvi) therefore splits her definition of nostalgia into two types of nostalgia that she describes as “restorative and reflective”. Reflective nostalgia is retrospective, in that it is generally individualistic and backward looking, whereas restorative nostalgia is a prospective forward looking nostalgia, that is generally exhibited by collective groups of people, for instance in nation-building projects written into the biography of nations. These two nostalgias are not always mutually exclusive. The concept of a restorative nostalgia is useful in my study because it permits a critique of the triumphalist visuality of rainbow nationalism, as the artist Bogosi Sekhukhuni in his Dream Diary video series, which I discuss in this thesis, engages it. ‘Rainbowism’, or the rainbow symbolism, I argue is underpinned by a restorative nostalgia, particularly when we consider the ways in which Rainbowism as a myth served the non-racialist nation-building project which marked a temporal rupture between the old and the new South Africa.

The term ‘rainbowism’ derives from ‘the rainbow nation; which is a descriptor that comes from the term “The rainbow people of God”, that was originally used by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in numerous televised appearances in the early nineties. According to Moller and Dickow (2002:180) in their paper “South Africa’s ‘Rainbow People’, National Pride and Optimism: A Trend Study” the phrase “the rainbow people” was coined by Tutu during a march of church leaders in Cape Town to parliament in 1989. Desmond Tutu later famously used the term again at

Chris Hani's funeral in 1993 (Møller and Dickow 2002:180). By 1994 the phrase had accumulated nationwide popularity and familiarity to such an extent that after a televised thanksgiving service celebrating the 1994 elections Tutu publicly announced to a crowd of cameras that, "We are the rainbow people of God. We are free, all of us, black and white together!" (Møller and Dickow 2002:180) (Eynon 2017:3). Furthermore, the term became crystallised in the public imagination after Nelson Mandela referred to South Africa as "a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world" in his inaugural address following the 1994 elections. It became a signifier for the new South Africa that is inclusive of all racial groups, a post-apartheid South Africa (Gqola 2001:99).

In his video art work, the South African artist Bogosi Sekhukhuni born in 1991, compiles and rearranges video vignettes drawn from the SABC television archive of this early nineties period. By using the methods, of slowing down the audio tempo, layering iconic jubilant scenes such of the 1995 rugby World Cup, against images of suffering, such as an image of the sickly Nkosi Johnson speaking into an oversized microphone. In this art work, Sekhukhuni critiques the contradictions of the new South Africa, which are sanitised and rendered palatable by this emerging future focussed restorative nostalgia, that underpins a dominant triumphalism of the rainbow nationalist myth. In this thesis, the underlying argument is how this myth of Rainbowist non-racialist unity and its ethos of unity in difference is still underpinned by an ego ideal of whiteness that hails black subjects into citizens of the "new" South Africa, provided they assimilate and engage in a nostalgic forgetting and disavowal of the "old pain" of the apartheid 'past'. I use the term "old pain" in order to echo Hortense Spillers's (2007:306), words when she states that for others "the cost of Americanization, of equality, is to forget. ... For others, the narrative of Americanization means that you have to forget the old country, the old land, the old pain, that you must forget it and that is the price you pay."

Nostalgia and Post-Apartheid Identity Formation

Nostalgia comes from the Greek word *nostos*, meaning to return home, and *algia*, meaning pain or longing. According to (Wilson 2014: 21) nostalgia then literally means “homesickness”. In the context of post-apartheid South Africa, the object of one’s nostalgia naturally unfolds within the context of apartheid. This has had implications for post-apartheid’s pattern of identity formation, and Klopper (2016:9) elaborates on the impact nostalgia may have in this aspect:

Within the current generation of those whose individual memory reaches back into the apartheid era, some are seen not to be entitled to nostalgia because they benefited from the politics of the past and some are said to have little to be nostalgic about because they were exploited by these politics (Klopper 2016:9).

The power of nostalgia rests in its ability to shape one’s relation to the past and in South Africa, this inevitably happens along racial lines. Correspondingly, the most immediate and logical presumption is that black people have little or nothing to be nostalgic about because they fall into the category of people that are in an explicit way “exploited by the politics of the past” (Klopper 2016:9). The denial of nostalgia, even amongst black people does not simply make it go away. I believe this is why Jacob Dlamini’s text *Native Nostalgia* attracted such notable criticism⁷ after it was published in 2009. It is precisely its seemingly problematic stance in the post-apartheid present that renders it provocative as a subject. For old white South Africans to exhibit nostalgia for an apartheid past that they are beneficiaries of is stereotypically conceivable. However, for ordinary black South Africans to exhibit and express a fond sentimental attachment towards this past, for the most part is taboo and indirectly a damning gesture towards the current dispensation. Jacob Dlamini (2009:5) suggests through the three notable characters in his book, Mrs Nkabinde, Mrs Ngcobo and Mr Ntswayi whose critical anecdotes preface his memoir, which revolves around the question of what it means for him as a black South African to remember his life under apartheid

⁷ See Andile Mngxitama’s (2011) “Whose story is it anyway?” In a review of Anton Harber’s *Diepsloot*, Mngxitama claims that Harber’s book and Dlamini’s *Native Nostalgia* can be categorised as part of the post-1994 “townships-are-not-that-bad” genre. He purports that this type of social history narrative operates as ‘giving voice’ to black people, with emphasis being put on “humanising” them. In Mngxitama’s words (2011), “This Oprahesque attitude of triumph of the human spirit over adversity ironically conceals the true nature of township reality and, in particular, the relationship it has with the privileged side of society.”

with fondness. In this way, Dlamini prefaces his text as a political social critique, concerning black discontent of the post-apartheid state in the present era; he uses nostalgia as a political tool here to comment on the lack of progress and improvement in black people's lives between the apartheid period and the present post-apartheid post-1994 period. Using nostalgia as a framework for critique proves to be a productive method. Nostalgia is an affective mode of remembering that fundamentally speaks about one's dissatisfaction with the present; therefore how better than to mobilize the concept in order to speak about the shortcomings of post-apartheid South Africa.

This use of nostalgia is important as it brings into question the teleology of progressive linear time in relation the black body. I agree with it, as far as how the ideology of modern temporal progression was used to justify colonial expansion, it was after all the "white man's burden" to benevolently assimilate, convert and civilize the native in order to integrate them into modern time, of which they are always belated. In order to justify itself, this logic and language of progress, disavows and cloaks the intentions of modernization for the black subject, which through enslavement and colonisation relegate black being into the zone of the non-being (Gordon 2005), object hood (Fanon 2008), "thingification" (Cesaire 2006) and animality (Mbembe 2015).

Enslavement and colonization are repackaged as a philanthropy, and as progressive development. Apartheid is a microcosmic expression of modern project's aforementioned intentions and I disagree with Dlamini about the possibility of implying – whether covertly or overtly – that apartheid was/is a better time. In the introduction to *Native Nostalgia*, Dlamini does this by choosing to open and set the tone of his memoir by interviewing black people who agree with the idea of apartheid being better time.

Interestingly, what follows in subsequent chapters is written as a memoir, which is a genre that is inherently foreclosed to criticism as it is overdetermined by the internal dynamics of it being an autobiographical genre of representation that depends on fragmentary personal recollections; in Dlamini's words as, "shards of memory" (Dlamini 2009:22). Nevertheless, more importantly, my

position is that Dlamini may share his complex yet reflective and fond memories accumulated during apartheid. The argument presented in this thesis does not push back against this, as one can imagine that there are many people, who, like Dlamini, would share happy and fond memories of their upbringing during apartheid.

The emphasis in this thesis is rather on how such fond memories of black social life do not exist necessarily outside of the greater structural paradigm of apartheid and the black precarity that it produces and naturalizes. Black social life exists inside of the paradigm, and again this position does not negate the role of agency and black performance within this paradigm (Sexton 2011:26). While some people may agree with Dlamini's perspective and methods, this thesis foregrounds that antiblackness remains embedded in the afterlife of apartheid. From this perspective, perhaps the discontent articulated by Dlamini's interlocutors emerges as the continuation of this paradigm. The ability to articulate the continuation of black exclusion and inequality, dressed in the guise of multiracialism in the form of rainbow nationalism and the "new" South Africa, is not a language that is well established in and outside the academy. For instance, Mrs Nkabinde is a community elder in Thandukukhanya, a township in Piet Retief, and she laments the abolition of influx control legislation in the mid-1980s that, through dehumanizing pass laws, regulated the movement of black people. Although Dlamini (2009:5) states that Mrs Nkabinde never says that, she misses apartheid, on the other the hand she believes the problems of her community began with the end of apartheid's influx control system.

Mrs Ngcobo, another local resident in the same community, is less ambiguous about her position in relation to the apartheid past, "The old government was better ... they would come to us and report". (Dlamini 2009:5). In a report published in *Time* magazine in 2009, Dlamini (2009:5) quotes Mr Ntswayi as bemoaning, "My life was better under apartheid ... freedom turned out to be just a word. Real freedom, real power comes from money".

What follows in the memoir is Dlamini's own fragmented recollections, recalling fondly yet "indirectly what it means to be nostalgic for a past generally considered to be a dark chapter in South Africa's history" (Dlamini 2009:22). In a similar gesture, which echoes the motives behind the cinematic township scenes of *I See a Different You* see figure 1, Dlamini's (2009:23) last appeal in the introduction is that the book will have succeeded if it helps the reader come to a new sense of townships in order to develop a different kind of common sense about them.

Although Dlamini's book is written in a literary genre, a new set of questions start to emerge when we consider it in the visual sphere. This dissertation grapples with the new knowledge that can be gleaned from visual articulations by examining the work of a number of young artists such as 'I See a Different You' Justice Mukheli, Innocent Mukheli, Vuyo Mpantsha and Bogosi Sekhukhuni, young artists who fall into the category of the "born free" generation, as they are born after the formal end of apartheid⁸. It is important to stress the point that these artists were born during the "rainbowist" optimism of the early nineties, yet at the same time, they use the theme of nostalgia as affective mode to magnify and analyse the continuities of the past and the new complexities of present-day South Africa.

As a testament to its cultural significance, in 2013, *Native Nostalgia* was given a visual dimension, when an exhibition was installed as a visual ode to the book. *Native Nostalgia* the exhibition as curated by Aaron Khon with the curatorial support of The Trinity Session and Philip Sandick at the Museum of African Design.

Native Nostalgia is a group exhibition that explores nostalgia across five African countries; Senegal, Nigeria, Algeria, Benin and South Africa (Bourbellion 2013). Whilst still at the data collecting stage of my research work, I attended this exhibition in February 2014. The museum

⁸ Malaika Wa Azania's (2014) *Memoirs of a Born Free: Reflections of the New South Africa by a Member of the Post-Apartheid Generation*, is a pertinent read in this regard. As a member of the so called born free generation, she reveals the devastating ways that apartheid continues to predetermine the contours of her life in post-apartheid South Africa despite being born in the aftermath of apartheid. Wa Azania states, "nothing about me or those who were born after me is free." In her memoir Wa Azania (2014:05) recognises that her experience of racism is not through violence in the raw sense of the word, she insists on how racialism are now institutionalized threads that hold together the fibre of South African society. In the light of this, she recalls painful experiences that come with being a black child in a Model-C school.

was visibly still in its infancy when it staged the *Native Nostalgia* show and this was evident in the rudimentary state of the building. *Native Nostalgia* was the museum's first full-length exhibition. Its bare and stripped interior resembled an industrial space in the process of being repurposed. Visible scaffolding and the audible construction noise consolidated the atmosphere of transition and process. Although it was an unintended consequence, the audible construction that was happening in the museum, played coherently into the media selected by artists in their expressions of nostalgia. Each artist used architecture, construction, cartography, photography, communal archives, and historical re-enactment in their conversation with nostalgia and the past (Bourbellion 2013).

One of the works that stood out was from the photography of the trio I See a Different You. Their work serves as a reminder that nostalgia is as much a spatial concept as it is a temporal one. Justice Mukheli, Innocent Mukheli and Justice Mpantsha make up the collective I See a Different You, who claim that through art they seek to disrupt the world's view of Africa from the negative to the positive. Their interventions initially started as a visual project to debunk negative perceptions of their hometown, Soweto. Their installation at the *Native Nostalgia* group show was a testament to this, as it engages Soweto through the affective prism of nostalgia. Their trademark portrait photographs were suspended from the ceiling encircling a Mercedes vehicle⁹ stationed in the middle of the gallery. The township Soweto, and by extension, Africa, represent to the world a place unworthy of a positive portrayal or beauty. I See a Different You is acutely aware of this consciousness and they seek to destabilise this worldview through their image making, hence they named themselves after their visual interventions of 'seeing differently'. In the process of framing the township differently, by presenting positive counter images I See a Different You produce a romantic and cinematic glow to some of their impoverished backdrops, as seen in Figures 1 and

⁹ The 1975 Mercedes 280E (W114) belongs to the trio, they drive it every day and it appears frequently in their photographs.

1.1¹⁰. These images, interestingly, echo the visual tropes of poverty pornography although it is evident that this is not their intention. Simultaneously, they also bring to mind an aesthetic evoked in Saidiya Hartman's (2017) "The Terrible Beauty of the Slum" where the ghetto is also a space black social life vitality and pleasure. Of course, not all their images have this effect; however, I argue that the romanticism underpinning their work resonates with Jacob Dlamini's *Native Nostalgia*.



Figure 1. I See a Different You. *I See a Different You*. Kliptown Soweto. 2013

¹⁰ Figure 1.1 was not included in the *Native Nostalgia* exhibition as it was only taken in 2017, but I include it as an example of the direction their nostalgic approach has taken recently.



Figure 1.1. *I See a Different You. I am not afraid of the dark.* 2017

Dlamini's memoirs, in a similar vein to *I See a Different You*, challenge what they view as the stereotypical representation that the townships; in his case he claims that Katlehong, his hometown, should not be reduced to a vast moral desert riddled by poverty and crime. Dlamini (2009: 18) uses the literary device of the memoir as a counter-narrative to what he views as the master narrative of doom and gloom:

What follows are fragments, shards of memory through which I examine indirectly what it means to be nostalgic for a past considered a dark chapter in South Africa's history. I use fragments drawn randomly from my childhood in Katlehong in terms of senses, smell, hearing, taste, touch and sight ... this book will have succeeded if it helps the reader come to a new sense of township, to develop a different kind of common sense about them (Dlamini 2009:23)

This idea of expanding the range of representation in order to capture the complexity of black life (even under apartheid) is not a new idea. Dlamini uses the theoretical paradigm of nostalgia as a tool to defy the master narrative:

The master narrative would have us believe that black South Africans who populate struggle jargon mostly as faceless ‘masses of our people’ experienced apartheid in the same way, suffered in the same way against apartheid. This is untrue ... The master narrative blinds us to a richness, a complexity of life among black South Africans that not even colonialism and apartheid at their worst could destroy (2009:19).

Dlamini’s use of nostalgia is underpinned by what he suggests is a celebration of diversity and difference. The use of nostalgic representation as a signification practice brings to the surface a type of a positive identification with the past, which he argues adds complexity and dimension to our present understanding of the past, as opposed to what he sees as the reductionist outcomes of the master narrative that he outlines in the preceding quotes. The photographs in Figures 1 and 1.1, I argue, are examples of where nostalgia is used as a signifying practice in the post-apartheid present.

In Figure 1, we see Innocent Mukheli and Vuyo Mpantsha wearing sunglasses and stylish smart suits; suspenders giving it an overall retro and cinematic feel complete Mukheli’s outfit. Mukheli and Mpantsha are standing against a backdrop of a vacant squatter camp; this backdrop is a horizontal strip of shacks made out of rusty corrugated iron and plywood. This is evidently the impoverished side of Kliptown. Figure 1.1, *I am not afraid of the dark* is a dark snapshot of the inside of a corrugated shack.

She is sitting inside a small round plastic tub; on the tub hangs a used blue cloth; her small hands grip the side of the tub as she stares trepidatiously into the eyes of the camera. Behind the girl sits a recognisable portrait of a mother carrying a child against her shoulder. This is an iconic picture, which could be found decorating the walls of many black South African family homes in the late eighties and in the early nineties.

In spite of the optimism that underpins these images, they nonetheless elicit a conflicted ambivalence from the viewer that I argue is typical of imagery that emanates from a post-apartheid nostalgia. At a formal level, they are undeniably aesthetically beautiful. They invite viewers to

relish in the warm glow of their familiarity. The suited-up figures Mukheli and Mpantsha in Figure 1, hark back to a fifties Sophiatown ‘Kofifi’¹¹ dandyism typified in old *Drum* magazines. Both images are taken from the vicinity of a squatter camp, hence the corrugated iron of the shack that forms the background: an ominous reminder of the everyday ongoing realities of black abjection¹². I See a Different You initially set out to visually undermine negative stereotypes about everyday township life in the Soweto. However, these two images draw more from a typically squatter camp setting, rather than from the township; although both settings are historically racialised spaces in South Africa¹³ there are slight differences and nuances that Nsizwa Dlamini captures quite powerfully in his interview “Soweto Now” with Achille Mbembe, where Dlamini (2008:240) explains:

Squatter camps are different from townships only in a material sense; they are more deprived and are home almost exclusively to the unemployed – those who have come to be seen by society as disposable people

This reality described by Dlamini is aesthetically reproduced in Figure 1.1, where we see the little girl bathing within a corrugated iron enclosure. Corrugated iron in South Africa is a

¹¹ Kofifi is another name for Sophiatown, a suburb in Johannesburg that was a black cultural hub during the early 20th century before the forced removals of 1955. The forced removals of blacks from Sophiatown to Soweto are considered one of the more controversial actions perpetuated by the apartheid government (Giliomee and Mbenga 2007:319). Sophiatown was the home of many influential cultural icons such as *Drum* magazine journalists, jazz artists, photographers such as Henry Nxumalo, Nat Nakasa, Can Themba and photographers such as Bob Gusani and Ernest Cole (Masilela 1990). In his essay “Black South African literature from the ‘Sophiatown Renaissance’ to ‘Black Mamba Rising’: Transformations and Variations from the 1950s to the 1980s” Ntongela Masilela (1990) regards this constellation of black cultural activity in Sophiatown as heavily influenced by the Harlem Renaissance in the United States.

¹² I use the term abjection in cognisance of Julia Kristeva’s (1980) *Powers of Horror* where she situates abjection with the ejection of something shameful and repulsive. Further, I use this term with Darieck Scott’s (2010) definition in mind. In *Extravagant Abjection*, Darieck Scott (2010) defines abjection as a way of describing an experience, a historical legacy and a social condition defined by defeat. I do not make the argument that photography of people photographed living in or next to shacks is the *exclusive* experience of black South Africans. My argument follows the line that the plight of black people living in squatter camps is a normalised condition in South Africa in other words it is perceived as “just another day” whereas the white people living in shacks is given disproportionate coverage, by comparison and it is generally treated as an urgent issue and warranting more attention and news coverage for instance in 2018, there were news articles published in *The Citizen*, “Google Images seems to think only white people live in SA squatter camps” and the *Mail and Guardian* (2018) news article “Why Google is showing you white South African squatters” support this claim.

¹³ In 2015, South Africa had a Gini coefficient of 0.63, representing South Africa as the most unequal country in the world, according to a report published in 2018 by the World Bank in collaboration with Statistics South Africa (2018). Gini coefficient is a term used in economics to measure inequality and wealth distribution in a country. According to this report, inequality in South Africa has persisted and increased since 1994. Poverty remains consistently highest among black South Africans. For instance, this means that black South Africans continue to consistently exhibit the highest poverty rates. “In 2015, 47 percent of the households headed by black South Africans were poor. This was very high compared to 23 percent for those in households headed by a person of mixed race (coloured), a little more than one percent for the population in households headed by an Indian/Asian South African and less than one percent among those in households headed by white South Africans” (2018:13.)

material that remains associated with shack dwelling and its realities of poverty and abjection that are typified by unemployment, vulnerability to violence and hopelessness,

Nostalgic distancing sanitises as it selects

In order to get from the front section of the Museum of African Design, where the *Native Nostalgia* exhibit was being held, one had to walk across planks of wood layered on construction scaffolding as seen in Figures 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4. The wooden planks were lettered in vinyl with quotes extracted from the theoretical work of Linda Hutcheon (2000) and William Cunningham Bissell (2005). In Figure 1.3, the plank reads, “nostalgic distancing sanitizes as it selects”¹⁴. Linda Hutcheon’s statement goes right into heart of the aesthetics of nostalgia, which I will discuss in this thesis. Hutcheon suggest that nostalgic distancing is comprised of the following qualities; sanitising and a selective approach to memory. Hutcheon (2005) and many other theorists on nostalgia – and I emphasise Jacob Dlamini in this instance – agree that nostalgia occurs as a direct result of a dissatisfaction with the present. The distancing that Hutcheon speaks of, is an attempt to escape or transcend the imperfect present, by reaching out into the past or the future. In South Africa, this would be to say that the present is undesirable if not wholly unbearable so as to justify why the past was a better time.

The scaffolding and the loose wooden planks can be read effectively within the context of transition and construction, not just of the immediate museum context but also within the post-apartheid space of South Africa; as a young nation still figuring itself out after 24 years of democracy. These are just some of the theoretical parallels that can be linked between the book and the exhibition. The quotes branded on the construction planks in Figures 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4 are features of the exhibition that contextualised the various artworks within the conceptual frame of nostalgia. If the dominant master narrative about the past is that of suffering and oppression as

¹⁴ This quote is drawn from Linda Hutcheon’s and Mario J. Valdes (2000) dialogue in *Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern: A Dialogue*.

Dlamini (2009) suggests, then nostalgic memory practice sanitises this past by bleaching out all the unsanitary parts. “This is rarely the past as it is experienced, of course, it is the past as it is imagined, through memory and desires”, these are Linda Hutcheon’s words that meet visitors as they navigate the museum space.



Figure 1.2. *Native Nostalgia* Exhibition, 1975 Mercedes 280E (W114) is parked in the middle of the museum surrounded by portrait photographs of *I See a Different You*, 2013 (Photograph by author)

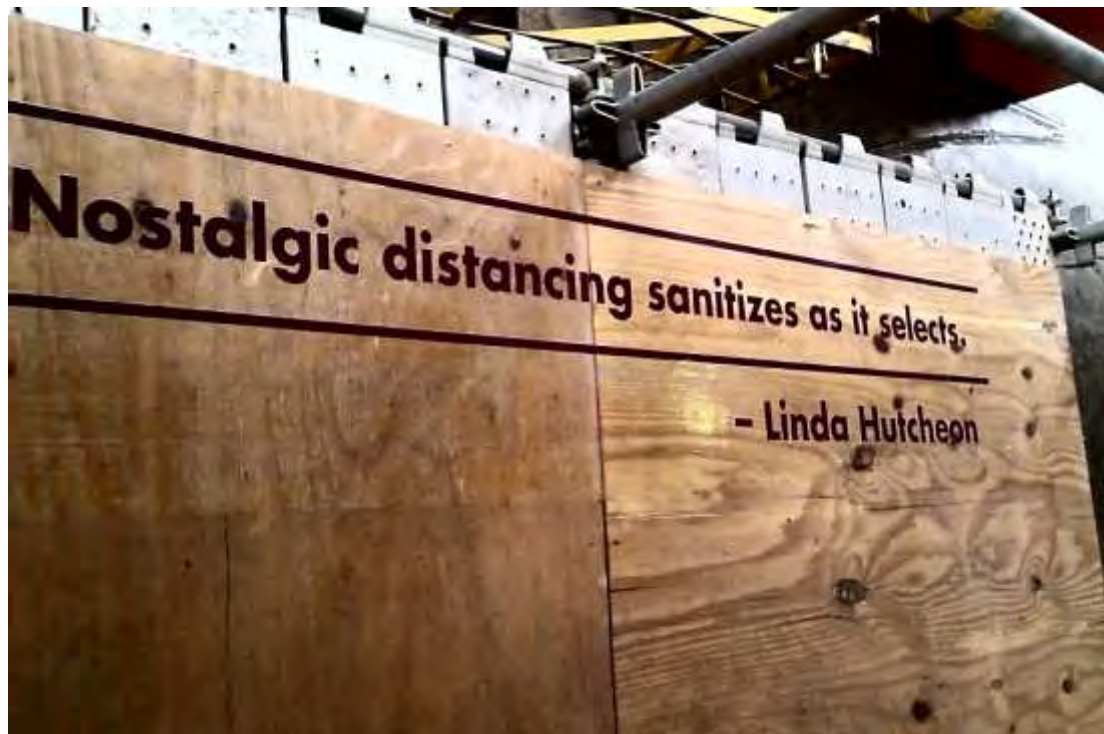


Figure 1.3. *Native Nostalgia* exhibition, sheets of wood laid on the floor with Linda Hutcheon quote, “Nostalgic distancing sanitises as it selects”, 2013, (Photograph by author)

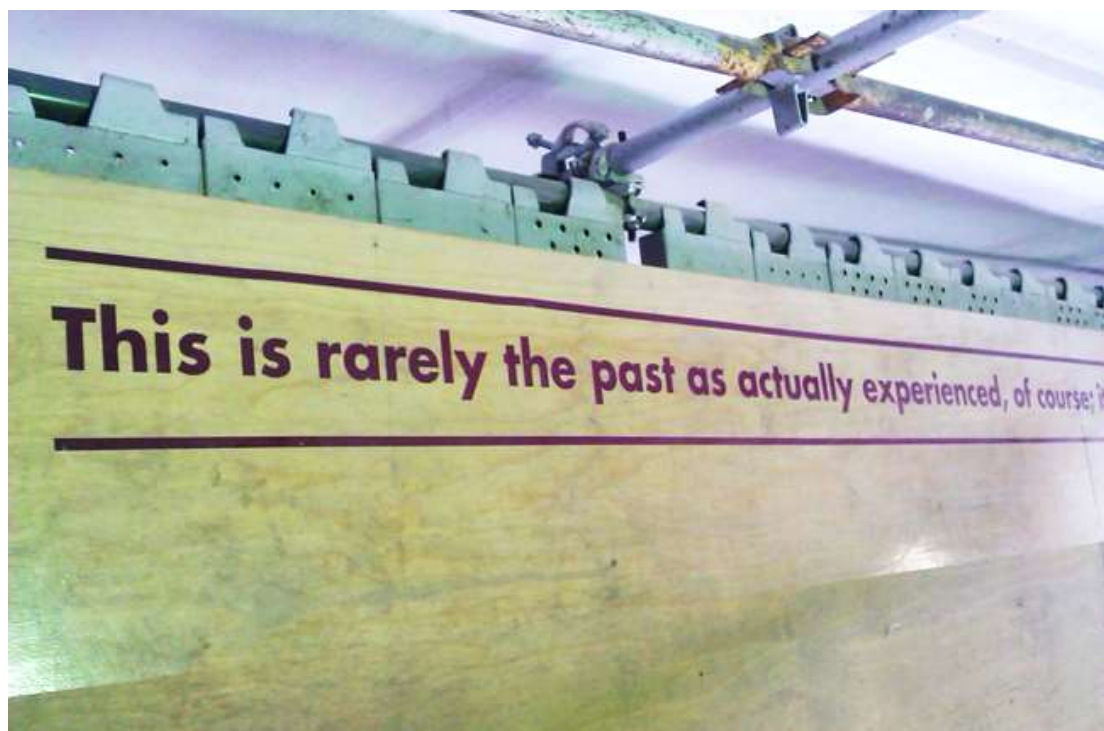


Figure 1.4. *Native Nostalgia* exhibition, sheets of wood laid on floor with Linda Hutcheon quote, “This is rarely the past as it is experienced, of course, it is the past as it is imagined, through memory and desires”, 2013, (Photograph by author)

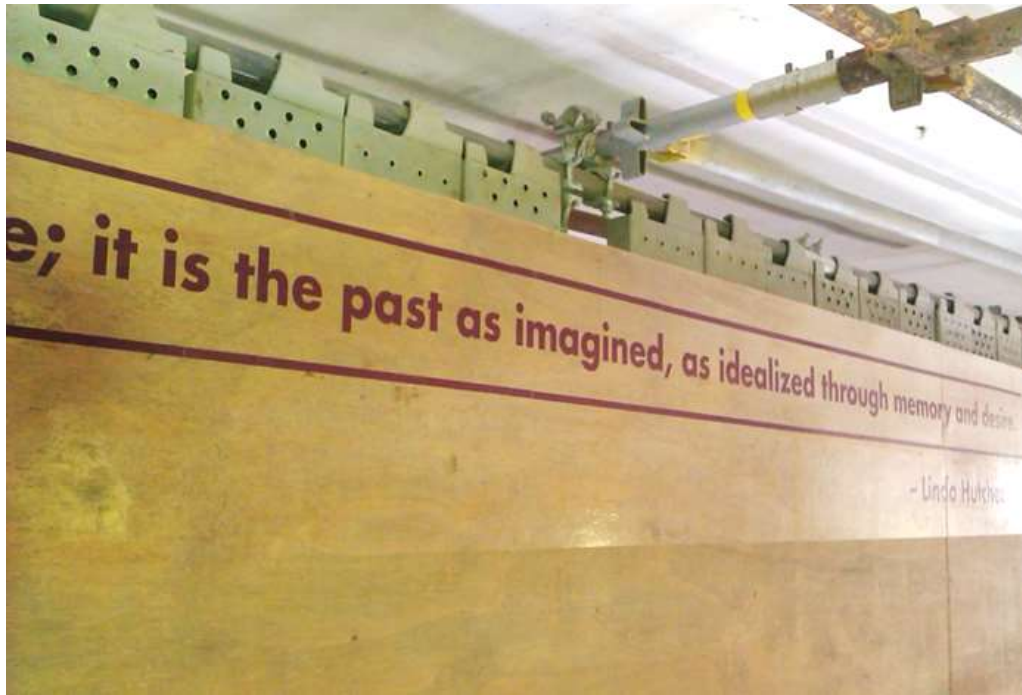


Figure 1.5. Native Nostalgia exhibition, sheets of wood laid on floor with Linda Hutcheon quote, “This is rarely the past as it is experienced, of course, it is the past as it is imagined, through memory and desires”, 2013, (Photograph by author)

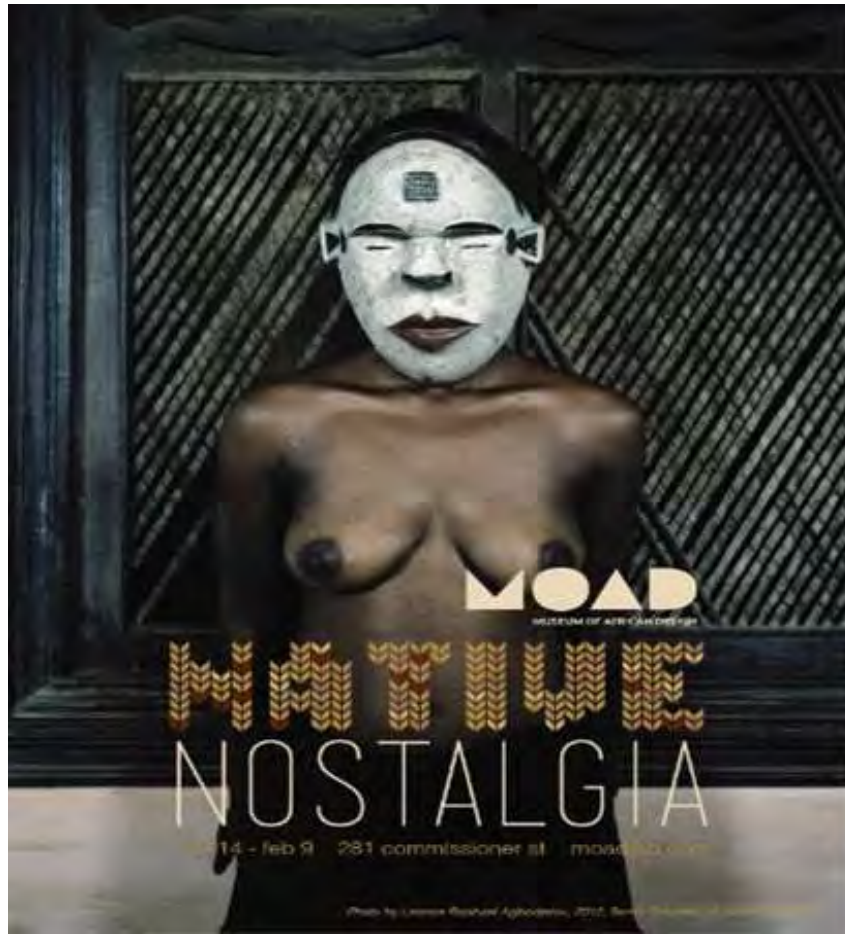


Figure 1.6. *Native Nostalgia* Exhibition Brochure, 2013



Figure 1.7. The enscripted wooden floors leading up to the sitting area where viewers can read the *Native Nostalgia* book, 2014 (photograph taken by the author)



Figure 1.8. Close up image of the reading area, 2014 (photograph taken by the author)



Figure 1.9. I See A Different You photograph suspended in the middle of the room close to the entrance, 2014 (photograph taken by the author)

The aestheticizing practices embedded into art practice can be read as gestures that unwittingly sanitise the past, especially archival imagery more specifically. In this way, art practice becomes a sanitising gesture that facilitates the enjoyment of nostalgia. Further, I argue that these aestheticising practices do not merely idealise and sanitise but they further exhibit the ‘past’ as palatable in a sadomasochistic way. The juncture where nostalgia meets art and visual practice is one of the least engaged aspects of nostalgic memory practice. I believe this is an insightful juncture that I intend on exploring in this thesis, the point where nostalgia’s sanitising and aestheticizing practices render abjection palatable in a sadomasochistic way. In this thesis, I put forward that nostalgia’s visual memory practice gives way to sadomasochism. My understanding of sadomasochism is partly influenced by Audre Lorde (1988) in an interview with Susan Leigh Star, where Lorde defines sadomasochism as an institutionalised celebration of dominant/subordinate relations. In other words, sadomasochism prepares us to accept subordination; sadomasochism can be seen as an enjoyment and a celebration of abjection and defeat. By using the term masochism I do not suggest that the dominated subject/object deliberately seeks out pleasure in pain, however I do think that their position is over-determined by the sadistic fantasy that they enjoy their own pain, humiliation and defeat. I believe nostalgic recall conjures these sadomasochistic relations. Nostalgia’s structure of feeling, its erasure and denialism implicates the lurking spectre of black suffering as unthought. A positive identification with this process unwittingly opens room for a sadomasochistic relation to occur I use Anthony Farley’s essay “The Black Body as a Fetish Object” to substantiate the argument presented in the sections on sadomasochism. I further discuss the theme of sadomasochism in chapter 5 where I use Lewis Gordon’s (1995) *Bad Faith and Antiracist Racism* and Amber Jamilla Masser’s (2014) *Sensational Flesh: Race, Power and Masochism*.

Nostalgia can be used as an affective platform that stages what Derek Hook (2014) identifies as the “the return of the repressed”, a term Hook borrows from Freud. Derek Hook’s

(Post) Apartheid Conditions: Psychoanalysis and Social Formation is relevant to my study, particularly in its endeavour to map out the psychosocial temporality of post-apartheid South Africa. *(Post) Apartheid Conditions* is a psychoanalytical study whose focus is immediate to the post-apartheid context. In his study, Derek Hook argues for nostalgia as a force that allows contemporary South Africans to articulate the inarticulable. Therefore, from this perspective “nostalgia becomes the right problematic” (Hook 2014).

In the sections “Nostalgia as a Defensive Formation” and “Mimed melancholia” Hook (2014:167) presents a compelling line of argumentation where he draws to our attention the “apartheid symbolic”, which in this thesis I suggest is in part constituent of antiblackness and its visual signifiers. According to Hook (2014:166) the “apartheid symbolic” is constituted of a network of roles, subject positions and key signifiers which underpinned a strong sense of agency, ideological values and a sense of destiny for white South Africans, particularly Afrikaners during apartheid (Hook 2014:166). Further, this structure of the “apartheid symbolic” is based on relations that stabilise and provide an “ontological security” for whites, whose positionality is inevitably felt as threatened by the end of apartheid. From this perspective, it becomes easy to see why studies on post-apartheid whiteness centre on melancholia, loss and displacement. Hook (2014:166) further elaborates:

It is no wonder that Melissa Steyn’s study of post-apartheid whiteness emphasizes the subjective position of dispossession and displacement in white Afrikaners who have felt a loss of home, autonomy, control, legitimacy and honour. Overall, it would be surprising if the end of apartheid were not experienced as debilitating and potentially melancholic loss for white South Africans. Such a glowing period for white narcissism was apartheid, enabling whites en masse to retain a belief in themselves as extraordinary, as deserving of privilege, that it is unlikely that its demise did not occasion an acute (if not wholly conscious) experience of loss. Apartheid continually affirmed notions of white privilege and entitlement producing one might assume a *jouissance* of an assumed superiority.

The outbreak of nostalgia that follows the end of apartheid¹⁵ can be studied as a defensive mechanism¹⁶ that narcissistically protects the white ego, an ego which subsequently after democracy comes under the spotlight and critical scrutiny (Hook 2014).

Whiteness as a system of normativity has come under critical scrutiny in post-apartheid South Africa and as a result an apartheid nostalgia of a colonial-settler variety emerges as a structure of feeling. It emerges not only to protect the ego-ideal of whiteness but it also permits an uncritical adulation of the colonial art archive as it were, specifically within contemporary curatorial and art writing practices. This is an art archive composed of paintings, prints and photographs that includes many canonical artists whose artwork is steeped in the reproduction of racist tropes. In a recent exhibition *All Your Faves Are Problematic* curated by Khwezi Gule that took place at the Johannesburg art gallery in February 2019, one can tangibly identify the prism of nostalgia that guides the stimulus of this exhibition. In the exhibition blurb, Gule (2019) explains:

In many instances, exhibitions around museum collections tend to gravitate towards either amnesia or nostalgia. The amnesia in this regard is not so much the function of forgetting but of downplaying and erasing some of the troubling legacies of South African art.

Although in this thesis, there is no room to delve into the detailed dynamics and significance of this exhibition, I believe it is noteworthy to mention it because it affirms and vindicates my argument on how nostalgia as a structure of feeling is shaping contemporary engagements with the art canon and its archive.

¹⁵ Svetlana Boym's (2001) book, *The Future of Nostalgia* becomes pertinent in that it points out what leads to outbreaks of nostalgia. According to Boym (2001: VI) outbreaks of nostalgia generally follow major epochal shifts in national history. Boym speaks primarily in the context of Eastern Europe following the dismantling of the Soviet Union after the defeat of communism between 1990 and 1999. This historical period interestingly coincides within South Africa's transition from a fascist state into a democratic one, marked by Mandela's release in 1990 and South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994.

¹⁶ Hook (2014:170) writes on this perspective in his essay, "Screened History: Nostalgia as a Defensive Formation". While nostalgia can be interpreted as a defensive mechanism against loss or perhaps an impending loss of status, it is a sentiment that can give way to a kind of mourning. This to Klopper (2016:10) is not a negative thing as it facilitates the mourning of the lost object as opposed to an excessive identification with it. What becomes evident here is an ambivalent melancholia, "one that simultaneously disavows and idolizes what has been lost".

The dismantling of apartheid heralded the perception of a historical shift, which created the conditions for the cultural production on nostalgia to unfold and flourish. This thesis is interested in Hook's (2014) intimations on the libidinal economy, where white superiority makes its investments. Nostalgia can be understood as a theoretical framework. Boym's theoretical underpinning of nostalgia is sufficient in that respect, particularly when we take into account how nostalgia operates as an affect, along a libidinal economy that carries with it collective structure of feeling and desires. This idea is particularly noteworthy as it dovetails with Afropessimism's¹⁷ position on contemporary representations on the grammar of black suffering, black precarity and abjection. The crux of the argument presented by Afropessimism which I explore in this thesis asserts that black abjection is necessary and indispensable to the libidinal economy of the world. Afropessimism argues that black abjection is a vital tenet for antiblack subject formation, in part because it provides gratification and a psychic stability for non-black subjects (Wilderson 2010). From this angle I examine Renzo Martens' (2008) film *Enjoy Poverty: Episode III* a documentary that dredges up and re-enacts familiar visual tropes about Africa. These are pathological throwbacks, visual tropes that are reminiscent of Joseph Conrad's (1899) *Heart of Darkness* and Henry Stanley Morten's (1890) *Through the Dark Continent*. In the documentary film, the Dutch artist Renzo Martens intimates that the spectacle of suffering in Africa is a resource that benefits the world and he implicates his own film project in the process. Although the chapter on the film is not directly faithful to the concept of nostalgia in an explicit way, it is necessary in aiding a deeper understanding of why art and visual media returns to these scenes in a cyclical manner. Wilderson (2017:33) points out that:

¹⁷ In this thesis, I foreground Afropessimism, which is a sub-discipline within black studies whose concepts I rely on quite substantially. In the interest of historicisation and contextualization I have mentioned in a footnote that although it is a wide area of study but its formation takes shape after the publication of Saidiya Hartman's book *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self Making in Nineteenth Century America* in 1997. In her review of the book in 1999, Anita Patterson describes the book as "pessimistic". It is from this description of the book where the genealogy of the term itself starts to take shape. Saidiya Hartman and Frank Wilderson (2003) discuss this moment in the Patterson's review in the article "The Position of the Unthought" published in volume 13 issue 2 of the journal *Qui Parley*. In the same volume there are essays by Huey Copeland and Jared Sexton's *Raw Life: An Introduction*, Kara Keeling's "In the Interval: Frantz Fanon and the "Problems" of Visual Representation" and David Marriott's "The Love of Neither-Either-Racial Integration in *Pressure Point*". These are all scholars whom directly and indirectly write within this sub-discipline of Afropessimism and I rely on their work in order to read the selected images in the thesis.

What we need to do is begin to think of violence not as having essentially the kind of political or economic utility that violence in other revolutionary paradigms have. Violence against the slave sustains a kind of psychic stability for all others who are not slaves.

What is immediate from the preceding quote is the deliberate connection between enslavement and blackness. I will come back to this point when I discuss Afropessimism. However, for now what is implied in Afropessimism is the dynamic of black suffering and abjection as a site of gratification. This thesis thinks through the ways in which the reproduction of nostalgia in the visual realm opens up room for deeper critique, as it raises critical questions about the status of the black image and the concomitant politics and poetics of the gaze that consume it.

It is worth reiterating that the book, *Native Nostalgia* was embraced by the Museum of African Design in 2013 in the exhibition titled *Native Nostalgia* that I discussed earlier. The visual rendition of the book further bolsters nostalgia as a structure of feeling in South Africa. In addressing the rhetorical power of nostalgia, one may begin by asking the question of what nostalgia allows one to readily admit to and say. This brings to mind the frequently stated idea that to deny nostalgia is equivalent to denying a part of oneself:

When I start feeling nostalgic, I say to myself that I may resist this feeling or I may succumb to it. If I resist it, I cut myself off from myself (Klopper 2016:12).

Klopper is not alone in expressing this implication embedded in the disavowal of nostalgia, Dlamini suggests this in *Native Nostalgia*, and it is further reiterated in my interview with Andile Buka, the project manager of the *Native Nostalgia* exhibition (see Appendix 3).

Further, the status of the black body politic in post-apartheid South Africa is at the heart of my critique, in relation to the recent revival of archival art and its constant reiteration in contemporary art. The archive as a site/sight where returns and repetitions are metaphorically

staged and re-enacted. Any iteration of the visual black archive inevitably dredges up the familiar scenes of black suffering. The image of black abjection that haunts the modern archive is interestingly erased, sanitised, beautified, consumed and enjoyed by the yearnings of nostalgia. This inevitably suggests that the theoretical literature on nostalgia simply does not possess the critical capacity nor explanatory power to address and make meaning of the erasure and enjoyment of black pain and suffering that it is facilitated by nostalgia and its memory images. It is from here that the theoretical paradigm of Afropessimism enters and becomes valuable to my study

This thesis reads nostalgia contextually both as a burgeoning structure of feeling in South African visual culture and as a mode of critique in the archival artwork of Ayana V. Jackson, Andrew Putter and Bogosi Sekhukhuni. The thesis also stretches the concept of nostalgia laterally, particularly its sentimental and metaphorical inflections of return and repetition. It does this in order to understand and accommodate the visual modes of consuming the black subject and black suffering to be more specific. Nostalgia alone, even in its plural sense as a dynamic theoretical framework simply falls short in addressing the particular ways that the black body is aestheticized and made fungible within the visual schemas selected in this thesis. Images are capable of holding multiple ideas simultaneously and as a result, I use nostalgia as a mode of critique appositionally to themes drawn from Afropessimism. In other words, I read nostalgia in concert with the theoretical analytic of Afropessimism in order to reach a fuller and a more coherent understanding of the representation of black suffering in the selected visual representation.

Afropessimism is an analytical apparatus and a mode of critique that I use to read the selected imagery in this thesis. An increasing body of literature that in parts informs my argument. It is important to note that while certain authors may use afropessimist arguments in their writing that read blackness through social death, this act does not necessarily mean that they identify themselves as Afropessimists and more importantly, this thesis is not concerned with that aspect.

In this section, I will unpack some of the theoretical components that I have drawn from it that have been useful to my analysis. The following texts exist within a larger constellation of writing that informs this area of reading of which in the scope of this thesis does not attend to in totality. I draw substantially from Saidiya Hartman's (1997) *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self Making in Nineteenth Century America*. I use this text to reference the concept of fungibility in relation to black body and the ways it is consumed. Moreover, I use Hartman's (1997) notion of the "primal scene" in reading the racist fantasy that implicates the subject formation for a spectatorship in a generative way.

Christina Sharpe's (2016) *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* has been valuable in shaping my understanding of how these selected archival images in their intersections with visual media function as a "hail" that interpellates viewers in the Althusserian sense. Frank B. Wilderson III's (2010) book *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* has been important in thinking about antiblackness and its visual representations as a form of world-making that shapes the libidinal economy where these images are exchanged and circulated. David Marriott's (2017) essay "The Perfect Beauty of Black Death" and his book *On Black Men* have been useful as far as they interrogate the aesthetic uptake of Black Death and black pain and the various ways that the artistic re-enactment of these scenes becomes an avant-garde of cruelty. Most of the above-mentioned writers draw substantially from Frantz Fanon (1967), Hortense Spillers¹⁸ (1987, 2003) and Orlando Patterson's (1982) works¹⁹ in order to centralise the premise of an indivisible relationship between enslavement and blackness. The reason for positioning Afropessimism and its use of social death as a mode of analysis in relation to the affective structure of nostalgia is based on the depth of analysis that it permits my argument to reach. This is not to

¹⁸ In *Black White and in Color*, Hortense Spillers (2003) states that through slavery the African is objectified and transformed into a being for the other, further, one of the most important concepts that Hortense Spillers (1987) presents in her essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: The American Grammar Book" is the distinction that she makes between "body" and "the flesh" in delineating between captive and free bodies

¹⁹ Black Skin, White Masks and Slavery and Social Death respectively

say that I do not draw from theoretical formations such as subaltern studies²⁰ and postcolonial theory²¹. Although the habits of antiblackness and its antagonisms vary in shades across the global north and south divide, this is a difference of degree, not category, as the phenomenon cannot be reduced to nation-statehood borders. This thesis finds it bearings from the premise of antiblackness as a condition that is pervasive at a global level²². Adam Bledsoe and Willie Jamal Wright (2018) deepen the understanding of this aspect by using case studies from both the Global North and the Global South, in their article, *The Antiblackness of Global Capital*. In this article they make the argument that antiblackness is a necessary precondition for the perpetuation of capital. In other words, they highlight “how antiblackness is not a mere result of global capital but actually scaffolds the grounds on which capitalism stands (Bledsoe and Wright 2018:2). Following this line of thought this thesis leans towards the idea that antiblackness is not exclusive to the American context, but that it has forms of expression that persist in, post-1994, post-apartheid South Africa, even after the formal end of apartheid. In Steve Biko’s *I Write What I Like*, he intimates that inasmuch as apartheid was historically and geographically specific to South Africa, it nonetheless remains a microcosmic expression of a larger world²³ order:

²⁰ Subaltern is a term drawn from the Marxist Italian Antonio Gramsci’s (1971) *Prison Notebooks* by a group of South Asian and Indian scholars comprising Ramjet Guho, Partha Chatterjee, Dipesh Chakrabarty and Gayatri Spivak. Their writings have a specific focus and interest in south Asian history and society. Thus, although the notion of subalternity has a global reach, it is generally associated with Indian Marxism (Chaturvedi 2012:vi)

²¹ Postcolonial theory and subaltern studies are not mutually exclusive despite the latter having a South Asian orientation. In “Subaltern studies and postcolonial historiography”, Chakrabarty (2000) argues that subaltern studies are underpinned by a postcolonial outlook in an effort to open up intellectual spaces for the formerly colonised world to speak for itself in its own terms. The formerly colonised/neocolonial world includes subjects from Asia, Africa, Oceania and Latin America, which generally fall under the concept of ‘the other’ in relation to the European ‘self’. Thus, postcolonial studies include writers of black and African descent such as Frantz Fanon, but not exclusively.

²² See Opel Tometi’s (2017) interview with the UN Human Rights office, Tometi is the co-founder of the Black Lives Matter movement. In the interview, Tometi reiterates the fact that there is an overwhelming number of reports, data, stories that illustrate the fact that black people experience antiblackness in every sector of society in every geographic context. Tometi (2017) further states that this is not one country’s issue, but literally a global occurrence that comes because of enslavement, colonialism and the contemporary neocolonial relations. https://medium.com/@UNHumanRights/antiblackness-is-global-an-interview-with-opal-tometi-Black-lives-matter_Accessed on 17 March 2018.

²³ See Natasha Howard’s (2011) doctoral thesis, “Black in the Non-Black Imagination: How Anti-Black Ideology Shapes Non-Black Racial Discourse”. Howard argues that one of the structural ways in which antiblackness manifests itself is through migration politics. Howard uses the work of Vilna Bashi (2004) “Globalized Antiblackness: Transnationalizing Western Immigration Law, Policy and Practice”, in order to outline how global politics of immigration demonstrate not only a preference for white immigrants but a concerted effort to severely restrict the movement of people identified as black. Although Howard’s study is located within sociocultural studies, she refers to visual culture quite often in order to substantiate her arguments. For instance, she refers to the work of John Russell (2001). In *Race and Reflexivity: The Black Other in Contemporary Japanese Mass Culture*, Russell unpacks the significance of globalised antiblack ideology using Japan as a case study. Russell, according to Howard (2011:28), argues that antiblack imagery is often disseminated through the media and other forms of Japanese popular culture. In constructing a genealogy of the black “other” in Japan, he states that the association of black people with apes and characterisations of them as subhuman is a very old idea that dates back several centuries. Russell further points out that both historical and contemporary visual representations of blacks are generally shaped by a stereotyping that conforms to ideas of black people as infantile, primitive, hypersexual, bestial, naturally athletic, and mentally inferior (Howard 2011:28)

There is no doubt that the black-white power struggle in South Africa is but a microcosm of the global confrontation between the Third World and rich white nations of the world which is manifesting itself in an ever more real manner as the years go by (Biko 1978, 2015:78).

Furthermore, one of the critiques that is presented against Afropessimist²⁴ writing is the claim that its locus of enunciation is exclusive to the United States²⁵. Moreover, at this current juncture between Africanisation and decolonisation within South Africa's academic lexicon²⁶, the framing of Afropessimist thought is likely or hypothetically to be received with misgivings, particularly with regard to perceptions that consider theory from the Global North – and America more specifically – as echoing an imperialist imposition.

This critique is partly informed by a selective reading. This kind of selective reading, as a result, erases the contemporaneous theorising on antiblackness that is being done in Latin America by Brazilian scholars such as João Costa Vargas (2018) in his recent book, *The Denial of Antiblackness: Multiracial Redemption and Black Suffering* and Jaime Amparo Alves's (2014) "Neither Humans nor Rights: Some Notes on the Double Negation of Black Life in Brazil". Having noted this, I believe it is important to state that as far as I am aware there are no Afropessimists in the sense that it is an identity that is performed, for the use of this thesis, I deploy Afropessimism

²⁴ I attended a talk by Paul Gilroy, 'Rhythm in the Force of Forces: Music and Political Time' that he presented at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research on 22 February 2018. Although Afropessimism was not a focus of Gilroy's presentation he openly expressed that it is a school of thought that is US centric in its idea of blackness. Achille Mbembe (2016) in his paper, 'Frantz Fanon and the Politics of Viscerality' that he presented at Duke University, acknowledges the immanence of Afropessimism in South Africa as a form of black critique in social movements. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lg_BEodNaFA Accessed on 17 March 2018.

Lewis Gordon in an interview with Jared Ball in imixwhatilike a podcast whose name derives from Biko's (1978) *I Write What I Like*, expresses his critique of Afropessimism. Accessed online <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FrIhjbNanH0> 17 March 2018

²⁵ The British scholar Kathryn Yusoff (2018) in her book *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, registers the impact of antiblackness to the study and formation of geology as a discipline. Kathryn Yusoff is a professor of inhuman geography and she argues that the Anthropocene is the annihilation of the colonial other, moreover it is "the fungibility of blackness and geological resources (as land, mineral and ores)". She critiques how the terminology of geology and blackness slip into each other as equivalent substances, she identifies how blackness is imbricated into in geological material terms such as "coal black, black gold and black metal" arguing that this lexicon uncovers the transactions between geology and inhumanism as mode of both production, extraction and subjection (Yusoff 2018:9). The line of questioning in *A Billion Black Anthropocenes* is how geology as a discipline "is cooked together in the crucible of slavery and colonialism" therefore implicating it within the world-making process of antiblackness.

²⁶ See for example *Ties that Bind: Race and the Politics of Friendship in South Africa* edited by Jon Soske, Shannon Walsh, 2016, Wits University Press, which examines the strengths and limits of Afro-pessimistic thought

as an analytical apparatus that critiques antiblack violence and social death. It is a mode of reading that I extract certain ideas from in order to read selected art work and images in this thesis.

More importantly, Afropessimism positions racial slavery as a relational dynamic, not as an isolated historical event that precludes the present and how people of African descent are seen and perceived in the world. Racial slavery is critiqued as a world-making ontological relation that underpins antiblackness in the world. It positions antiblackness as a relation that persists and recycles itself even after the manumission of slaves in the Americas. Although the following point is not related to the focus of my research question, I should mention that there is no text that I have consulted in writing this thesis that falls within the literature of Afropessimism that negates black resistance or more specifically the Haitian revolt in 1791. I reiterate that it is the persistent hegemony of antiblackness that recycles itself beyond the revolt that I believe would be of critical interest. In fact, it can be argued that it is precisely the triumph and success of the Haitian revolt that led to Europe's renewed interest in returning to Africa with colonial fervour, Jeremy D. Popkin (2012:2) explains:

Taught a harsh lesson by the success of the Haitian revolution, British and French governments and economic interest groups began to think that it might be more profitable to establish colonies in Africa itself, where blacks could be regimented to produce for the European market without the moral stigma associated with the transatlantic slave trade. The Haitian revolution was thus directly linked to the beginnings of European imperialism that would, by the end of the nineteenth century, affect almost the entire continent of Africa and many other parts of the world.

In Afropessimist thought, by way of Wilderson (2010), if slavery is understood through the condition of social death, then this enables us to grapple with the persisting continuum of

antiblackness notwithstanding the event/non-event²⁷ of emancipation or liberation. One may ask, what is social death? Wilderson (2017:40) drawing from Orlando Patterson, outlines that social death has three constituent elements: the first is gratuitous violence, which means that the body of the slave is open to the violence of all others. Whether or not 'the slave receives that violence, they exist in a state of open vulnerability' The second principle is natal alienation, this means that one's filial relations are not recognised by the world as legitimate, and this reinforces the first principle and makes it applicable. The third and final tenet is the condition of existing in a state of general dishonour, in and of one's being, and not having to have performed prior dishonourable acts in order to be seen and treated dishonourably (Wilderson 2017:40).

These three tenets are not mutually exclusive, they are intertwined and they reinforce one another in various ways. This thesis proposes that we think of these principles against the backdrop of the imagery that continues to surface and grip the South Africa's national consciousness in recent years I sense that social death in the form of natal alienation, general dishonour and gratuitous violence holds a strong explanatory potential in South Africa although I make this point tentatively.

I am referring to visual incidents where a particular residual question continues to resonate after the event, where commentators will often ask how these acts, acts of the past, can continue to occur in our current present, in the post-apartheid moment. Afropessimism offers a theoretical lens by which one can analyse the relations and intersections of power and violence at the level of the libidinal economy²⁸. Further, the concept of the libidinal is important as it relates closely to the Fanonian ideas of negrophobogenesis, negrophilia and the negrophobic object where the

²⁷ I borrow the term non-event from Saidiya Hartman's use of the term in her book *Scenes of Subjection* (1997:125) where she explains how despite the fact that the emancipation of slaves in the US announces the end of chattel slavery it by no means ends their bondage. I think the event of democracy for blacks in South Africa is riddled with similar ironic overtones, where the inequality that characterised apartheid remains stabilised along racial lines, as opposed to class lines.

²⁸ According to Jared Sexton (in Wilderson 2010:15) the libidinal economy is the distribution and arrangement of desire and identification, of energies, concerns, points of attention, anxieties, pleasures, appetites, revulsions, and phobias—the whole structure of psychic and emotional life—that are unconscious and invisible but that have a visible effect on the world, including the money economy.

anxieties, pleasures and phobias of the world coalesce upon black corporeality and its representations. I make an argument about how the libidinal operates at the level of the black imago. Another pillar of Afropessimism resides in the work of Hortense Spillers (1987) who, in her canonical essay “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: The American Grammar Book”, states that through slavery the African is objectified, and transformed into a being for the other: the captor. Further, one of the most important concepts that Spillers (1987) develops is to make a distinction between the “body” and “the flesh”:

Before the ‘body,’ there is the ‘flesh’ that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography.

In distinguishing between the “body” and the “flesh”, she is making a distinction between free bodies and captives, respectively.

1.2 ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION

The original contribution of this thesis is that it presents a reading of contemporary South African archival art through the theoretical lenses of nostalgia and Afropessimism. Although there has been a considerable amount of engagement with the archive and its ‘past-images’ as aforementioned, it is seldom through the intellectual scrutiny of nostalgia in South Africa. Further, the question of the forms of nostalgia in post-apartheid South Africa has been raised quite substantially in other disciplines such as literary studies. For instance in journal *English in Africa* (2016) published an issue on nostalgia, to which I contributed an article “Post-apartheid Nostalgia and the Sadomasochistic Pleasures of Archival Art”. Many of the contributions in this issue

emanated from literary studies.²⁹ Jacob Dlamini's (2009) *Native Nostalgia* is a notable text that has generated a renewed interest around the question of nostalgia in contemporary post-apartheid discourse.

The impact of Dlamini's *Native Nostalgia* can be identified in its translation into the visual realm as an exhibition *Native Nostalgia* (2013) which I discuss in this introductory chapter. Further, my argument raises questions around the visibility of blackness, black suffering, and antiblackness within the visual archive. As a result, I read nostalgia in concert with selected concepts in Afropessimism, which I have outlined in this chapter.

In addition to the selected archival artwork in this thesis, I analyse a handful of contemporary media images, using the conceptual frames of nostalgia in concert with concepts derived from Afropessimism, in order to reveal the underside of rainbow nationalism and the shortcomings of its futuristic dimensions. This selection of images, I argue, have gripped South Africa's national consciousness in ways that demand a deeper analysis. Here I do not use the concepts of nostalgia to read the image in and of itself; I merely frame the images within a contextual nostalgic structure of feeling that makes the images uncannily familiar in an unfamiliar kind of way. In these sections, I primarily apply the concept of nostalgia to think about the time and space of post-apartheid South Africa and how these images appear like déjà vu scenes in ways that speaks about the complex mood and zeitgeist of post-apartheid democratic South Africa. Post-apartheid cultural practice is saturated by nostalgia, which sentimentalises the past through the disavowal of the violence against and negation of black bodies that shaped colonial and imperial histories. I examine two such memory images, taken from the media. One from the Marikana massacre of 2012 – in which a striking miner is portrayed as a phobogenic object and source of menace – and the other from the Reitz Four incident of 2007 – in which black university

²⁹ Judith Lutge Coullie (2014) is another literary scholar who has recently written on nostalgia in response to Jacob Dlamini's *Native Nostalgia*. In her article "The ethics of nostalgia in post-apartheid South Africa" Coullie uses the work of Avishai Margalit and Paul Ricoeur in order to explore "his use or abuse of individual memories of life during apartheid" (2104:196).

housekeepers and janitors are represented as enjoying their humiliation at the hands of white students. The visibility of post-apartheid public culture reveals the ways that rainbowism ironically remains co-opted by the common sense of antiblackness, positioning black bodies as fungible and non-human.

Although indirectly, I also discuss Figure 2.1, the photograph (2008) taken of Ernesto Nhamuave, the Mozambican man who was burnt alive during the 2008 Afrophobic/xenophobic violence. I examine the aesthetic uptake of this image and how it is used as a graphic design logo for *Infecting the City*, a performance art festival in Cape Town. These images and recordings are encoded with visual tropes and ways of seeing that are not new, despite the righteous outrage that quickly followed their publication. However, they become compelling when one begins to read them in proximity to the imaginative work practised in archival visual artwork by artists who intentionally draw from past images in order to make statements about the present.

What becomes compelling in my argument is the significance of the aesthetic implements and outcomes that artists apply and anticipate in their visual quotations and visual samplings of the archive. These are not measures that are exclusive to visual art practice. On 17th of April 2019, I attended the exhibition opening of *Killing the Other* (2018). The exhibition took place at the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre. The exhibit displayed photographs taken by two award winning photojournalists, Alon Skuy and James Oatway, who took images of the 2008 xenophobic violence. Some of the opening remarks of Professor Tawana Kupe were noteworthy. Despite the graphic content of the photographs Kupe described the images as “beautifully taken about something terrible”. Through the aestheticizing dimensions of the photography in compatibility with the sanitising gestures of nostalgia’s memory recall, in this thesis, I argue archival art makes the past look good; graphic imagery of pain and suffering becomes consumable sadomasochistically. This is not a moral charge against the work as I argue that this aspect is affirmative and valuable because it reveals the repressed desires and yearnings that one may not

be able to effectively scrutinise outside of the affective and theoretical paradigm of nostalgia. This brings to mind a short article, “The Perfect Beauty of Black Death” written by David Marriott (2017). In this article, Marriott ruminates on the aesthetic uptake of black death, in what he calls “the aesthetic function of Black death”. Moreover, Marriott continues to explain, “Blackness is a fungible entity that owes its origin in the world as a commodified property and one whose death has been performed relentlessly, repeatedly, narcissistically”.

My contribution in this thesis seeks to unravel the ways in which nostalgia functions aesthetically, shedding light into the ways that it facilitates return, repetition and enjoyment in archival art practice. The artists whose work I engage with on this score are, Andrew Putter, Ayana V. Jackson, and Bogosi Sekhukhuni, as they draw from the archive in order to make commentary about the contemporary moment. In the process of doing research and collecting data towards my research, I interviewed Andrew Putter and Ayana Jackson and both interviews³⁰ are transcribed and included in the appendix. When Joseph Coetzee and I co-authored Bogosi Sekhukhuni’s (2014) catalogue *Unfrozen: Rainbowcore* towards his first solo exhibition, we had a lengthy conversation with Bogosi where he spoke about his interest in the South African broadcasting media archive of the early nineties. Although this interview was not recorded, it has significantly influenced my discussion and argument about his video diaries that I discuss in chapter four.

1.3 ART HISTORY AND VISUAL CULTURE IN RELATION TO THE LIBIDINAL ECONOMY AND THE DECOLONISATION OF KNOWLEDGE

Nineteenth and early twentieth century anthropology and ethnography have played a substantial role in shaping aesthetic conventions traditionally used for classifying black bodies along the

³⁰ For further contextualization on artist interviews please see Joanna Grabski and Carol Magee’s (2013) *African Art, Interviews, Narratives: Bodies of Knowledge* and Robert Storr’s (2017) *Interviews on Art* edited by the art historian Francesca Pietropaolo.

curious categories of “types,” “tribes,” “natives” “primitives”, and “noble savages”³¹ (Stevenson 2001:121). My discussion is not limited to nor exclusive to the anthropological, the ethnographic or even disciplinary limits of art history for that matter. In my view, the canon of art history in its western origins was not designed to respond to questions pertaining to black precarity and the unthought dynamics of antiblackness. if anything, the discipline is implicated in the disavowal of these processes.

Reading art and images through the discursive frame of nostalgia opens up an opportunity to think beyond the methods of periodising and historicising; which remain important yet conventional methods of making meaning of art images. These conventional methods of periodising often consolidate a successive and linear understanding of art objects and their contextual meanings. Reading in this linear way also unconsciously promotes a form of thinking that as time passes, things get better. Nostalgia is an affective and a sentimental medium that communicates and carries with it feelings, desires and fears; it has a libidinal economy that can be foregrounded in the quest for meaning. The libidinal economy of nostalgia can account for a desire for repetition and return in the antiblack image economy that is often disavowed. Through nostalgia and the category of the libidinal economy, fantasies of excessive destruction can be brought to the surface and exposed. Antiblack consumptions and social availability that animate the realization of violence can be avowed, to echo Jared Sexton (2016). Reading through the libidinal economy opens up an “an analysis of how antiblack fantasies attain objective value in the political and economic life of society and in the psychic life of culture as well” (Sexton 2016).

Art History, Interdisciplinary and Decolonization

³¹ I am aware that the concept of the “noble savage” is not exclusive to the visual classification of Africans in particular. It is a mode of representation that emerged in the late eighteenth century that informed the pictorial conventions that exoticise non-Western people in ways that reflect the Enlightenment views of the non-Western world (Stevenson and Graham-Stewart 2001:23). This thesis however focuses on the representation of black African subjects.

My sense is that one has to always take an interdisciplinary approach in order to think about the question that I pose in this thesis of nostalgia and its representation of the black body. The tense relationship between black (subjectivity/objecthood) and modernity is first introduced in the work of W.E.B Du Bois (1903) where he centralises the question, “What does it mean to be a problem?” Du Bois is posing as a question how Western thought diagnoses black people as innately problematic, not as people that face problems in the modern world. In “African-American Philosophy, Race and the Geography of Reason” Lewis Gordon (2006:5) elaborates this question as a way of revealing its implicit methodological and epistemological implications. He writes:

People should be studied as human beings, but what do we do when the humanity of some groups is challenged? We need in other words, to find a way to study black people without black people being problems in themselves.

Once we metabolize the solid fact that black subjects are a group marked by their banishment from the category of the human, Du Bois’s question arrives with epistemological implications pertaining to the colonial function of the disciplines under the paradoxical banner of the humanities. Gordon (2006) expands this fundamental point, elucidating that the problem status of black people is precisely what sustains the legitimacy of Western knowledge systems, which work to faithfully reproduce conditions of the colonality that directly create problems for blacks. This means that to understand blacks as human beings facing problems in the modern world translates to a direct charge on the legitimacy of Western epistemology. This move implies that Western epistemology is flawed and limited, to put it more directly, that is to say that the state of knowledge production is colonised: that in its current state of capture, the state of knowledge production is incapable of being accountable to black subjectivity in the modern world.

Although decolonisation has direct implications for the canon of art history and visual studies, the process of decolonisation reaches beyond the scope of any singular disciplinary focus because the call for decolonising knowledge undercuts at a holistic and fundamental level. If the

academy agrees that knowledge is in fact colonised, as scholars the next step is to understand how colonial domination is manifested in our respective disciplinary spectrum. Moreover, in post-apartheid South Africa, it becomes explicitly clear why the national call to decolonise is agitated for by black students. Black students perennially find themselves severely excluded, alienated and humiliated in institutions of knowledge production. Gordon's (2014) central thesis in "Disciplinary Decadence and the Decolonisation of Knowledge" enables us to connect the dots, and the picture that starts to emerge is an uncannily familiar one, a picture that paints black people as problems. It is noteworthy that the call for decolonisation entered our national consciousness through the visual domain in 2015. The single act of a student throwing faecal matter on the statue of Cecil John Rhodes, opened up a nationwide cross campus conversation on decolonisation. I am referring to the Rhodes Must Fall movement that began at the University of Cape Town in 2015, and then spread to other campuses in South Africa and eventually to Oxford University in the UK. It is worth noting that the visual became the nodal point from where decolonisation entered the lingua franca of higher education discourse, agitating for a radical rethinking and redefinition of the purpose of higher education. The Fallist domino effect affirmed that the visual is a definitive zone in post-apartheid South Africa, particularly in the manner that protest was galvanised along the axis that colonial-apartheid is not in the past as if the ideology of rainbowism would like us to believe.

Who would have known those 112 years after his death, the ghost of Cecil John Rhodes would loom large in post-apartheid spaces of knowledge production, an untimely signifier that we remain locked under its yoke of epistemological colonialism³²? W.E.B Dubois's charge in 1903

³² In South Africa, racism pervades all institutions of learning; I wish this was an overstatement. As I write this section, black high school learners in Pretoria and Port Elizabeth are in protest after being ridiculed by white school teachers that their natural hair is "untidy," that it "looks like a bird's nest", that "they look like sheep". The school girls were told they would not be permitted to write exams if they arrived at school with their natural hair; "Afros". Afro is used to describe the natural curl of African hair. Further, teachers advised the girls to relax/straighten their hair, threatening that they wouldn't be allowed to write exams if their hair wasn't straightened. The ideological implications of this mean that black learners continue to be blocked from epistemological access. In part because they are attending school as they are, by not straightening their hair and assimilating to white standards of respectability and appearance. This incident is not an exception; it is the standard. For as long as I was in school, it was typical to be threatened with detention if one was heard speaking one's mother tongue, an African language. www.citizen.co.za/1267564/uproar-as-pretoria-girls-black-pupils-in-untidy-hair-protest accessed on 31 August 2016

that black subjects are treated as problems still carries an uncanny poignancy in the contemporary context. Lewis Gordon aptly remarks, “Modern colonialism leaves no room for a normal black body” (2006:12). In order for modern settler colonialism to come to full fruition the precondition is that black bodies are subjugated into servility, dehumanised into the status of beasts and ultimately eliminated out of visibility. In his text, *On the Postcolony*, Achille Mbembe (2015:113) expresses a similar statement pertaining to invisibility:

The whip and the cane also served to force upon the African *a concocted identity*, an identity that allowed her/him to move in the spaces she/he was always being ordered around, and where she/he had unconditionally to show submissiveness – in forced labour, in public works local corvee labour, military conscription. [Emphasis mine]

The concocted identity that Mbembe refers to is precisely the veil that (in) visibilises black subjects, rendering them as both knowable in a corrupted sense and unknowable in a true sense. It speaks to the idea that their experiences and modes of being in the world do not constitute sites of knowledge. My dissertation indirectly attends to this idea; in the next chapter, I unpack the nostalgic inflections contingent to primitivist tropes in modern forms of visual expression

1.4 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

Chapter One: Introducing Post-Apartheid Nostalgia

Chapter one introduces the background and the theoretical foundations of this thesis. In this chapter, I outline how archival art production has been an entry point from where critical questions around memory are framed and engaged. Further, in this chapter, I outline how nostalgia can be read as a “structure of feeling” in South African cultural production following the aftermath of apartheid. This is a view that also is pointed out in Derek Hook’s (2014) timely essay “Screened History: Nostalgia as Defensive Formation” which is invaluable to my argument. Although I consider Okwui Enwezor’s (1996) essay “Reframing the Black Subject” as arguably the earliest discernment of what this thesis considers to be a burgeoning structure of feeling of post-apartheid

nostalgias in South African art production, I delve in deeper and deliberately into the questions and the implications of nostalgia in visual production. I explore this question in art practice as it travels via the visual translation of Jacob Dlamini's memoir (2009) *Native Nostalgia*. This is not to erase prior iterations of this aesthetic prior to the novel; moreover, this chapter examines the book's visual translation into an exhibition and rather than the polemic debates around the book itself.

In this chapter, I justify the use of Svetlana Boym's (2001) definition of nostalgia in *The Future of Nostalgia* where she identifies two nostalgias. The first one is reflective nostalgia, which is usually retrospective. The second one is a restorative nostalgia, which is prospective and is used in the construction of collective identities. Although these two definitions are not mutually exclusive, the prospective dimension of nostalgia allows me to analyze the rainbow nation myth as a form of a restorative nostalgia that enables a collective identity formation of a 'new South Africa'. The artworks of Bogosi Sekhukhuni and Gerald Machona are pertinent in analyzing this new myth founded upon a collective and restorative nostalgia in the form of 'rainbowism'. To reiterate a previous point, that images are capable of holding multiple ideas simultaneously, in this chapter I outline the specific concepts that I draw from the theoretical analytic of Afropessimism which permits me to examine the implications of the sanitising aesthetics of nostalgia in the representation of black suffering and black pain.

Chapter Two: The Archival Turn.

Chapter two³³, "The Archival Turn" revolves around the figure of the black body in time. I argue for a non-chronological reading of the black figure in the archive: I insist that the visual archive, or rather archival art is a site/sight of the black's subject-object formation. Using

³³In September 2015, following a symposium *Nostalgia, Disenchantment and the Contemporary Southern African Literary Imaginary*, hosted by the English Department at Rhodes University, I presented a paper on post-apartheid nostalgia, parts of which have been extracted from chapter two, and have been published in *English in Africa*, (2016) as "Post-Apartheid Nostalgia and the Sadomasochistic Pleasures of Archival Art" edited by Nedine Moonsamy and Dirk Klopper. Furthermore, I have presented a part of chapter two at a conference "At Work in the Archive" hosted by the anthropology department at the University of East Anglia in the UK in 2014.

Fanon's idea of "negrophobogenesis" and Saidiya Hartman's (1997) "terrible spectacle", I discuss the archive as a site of interpellation where black subjectivity is constructed as pathological. In this chapter, I provide a substantial account of my use of the term 'archive'. I deploy the term archive not so much as a physical place although I do subscribe to the idea of the body as an archive, as a sentient repository of information. Moreover, in this thesis, I primarily understand the archive in a Foucauldian sense as a "system that governs the appearance of statements" (Foucault 1979:129).

Writing chapter two was particularly challenging because I wrote it against the backdrop of the Rhodes Must Fall movement and its urgent demand for the decolonisation of the curriculum and the call free education. This inevitably became a push to think about the status of art history and visual culture as a disciplinary formation in relation to the imperative to decolonise the curriculum. One of the things we were left to think about quite deeply as scholars is how the discipline of art history and visual culture understands and responds to crises. My overall argument in this thesis contemplates the various ways in which the discipline formation responds to, clarifies or perhaps obscures the visibility of black abjection under the auspices of nostalgic recall.

Chapter Three: On Nostalgias

In Chapter three, "The Ontology of Nostalgias" I trace the modern genealogy of nostalgia by implicating it as an offshoot of modern imperial temporality. I explore the various ways that the violence of nostalgias structures the aesthetic paradigms of primitivism and alterity in modern and contemporary art practice. The argument in this chapter aims to elaborate on the various ways that nostalgia erases and inflicts systemic violence, in both real and representational forms in its reproduction of black bodies as temporal others. In order to substantiate this argument, I loosely consult the following texts; Renato Rosaldo's, (1989) "Imperialist Nostalgia", Sarah Brackes (2012) text "Nostalgia's Violence" and Johannes Fabian's (1983) book *Time and the other*. On

this score, I use imperialist nostalgia as a theoretical tool to critically examine the artworks of Andrew Putter's (2013) *Native Work*. This photographic series heavily references Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin's ethnographic portraits with which I draw comparisons. In the same vein, I discuss Ayana V. Jackson (2013) photographic series, *Archival Impulse*. My analysis is guided by the ideological premise that imperial nostalgia is underpinned by the precondition of violence. The violence of this type of nostalgia rarely invites interrogation and scrutiny in the canonical literature that historicises it, therefore this chapter sets out to address that gap in its manifestations in contemporary art.

Chapter Four: Post-apartheid Nostalgia and its Images of Common Sense

Chapter four, "Post-apartheid Nostalgia and its Images of Common sense"³⁴ reflects on the contradictions and ironies that underwrite post-apartheid temporality. By reading the imagery of the Marikana massacre and the Reitz incident as images of post-apartheid common sense, this chapter will further reveal how superficial performances of reconciliation³⁵ stage the impending arrival of the future and how they characterise and scaffold post-apartheid South Africa and its general public performative repertoires. In ruminating on the freedom and unfreedom of democracy and its visual manifestations, my argument focuses on both real and representational forces and the manner in which they work in tandem to restrain the future; this, I claim, is suggested by the transference of the black body from one state of "unfreedom" to the next, resonating in a cyclical pattern. Frantz Fanon (1967) recognises this characteristic when he

³⁴ I attended and presented at a conference on "Diverse Unfreedoms and their Ghosts" hosted by the department of Africana Studies at Rutgers University. I presented on "Post-apartheid Nostalgia and its Images of Common Sense" which is in the process of being published in a volume by Rutgers University Press. It is worth mentioning that Orlando Patterson was the key note speaker at this conference.

³⁵ I borrow the notion of superficial performances of reconciliation, from Shannon Walsh and John Soske's introduction in, *Ties That Bind: Race and Politics of Friendship in South Africa* (2016). One could consider this book as part of the first deliberate pronouncements of Afropessimism as a paradigm of analysis in the South African context. Walsh and Soske gather essays and interviews written by Lesego Rampokoleng, Stacy Hardy, Frank Wilderson and Franco Barchiesi et al. The importance of this book lies in its critique of what Soske and Walsh describe as the intersection of race and friendship in South African life and politics. Liberal efforts to stage friendship between whites and blacks sought to create and image of equality, an image that has come to represent the interests of the democratic nation building project.

suggests that colonial temporality is a “hellish cycle” or an “infernal cycle” wherein the past overwhelms the present at the expense of a movement towards the future (Keeling 2003:97). Apartheid brutality is somatic therefore; my analysis is structured on the visibility³⁶ of the black body in the post-apartheid body politic. In reading the performative ways in which a post-apartheid temporality is staged I argue that rainbowism is characterised by everyday acts of sadomasochism, which accumulate and explode into the realm of the spectacle. The South African artist Bogosi Sekhukhuni’s videos *Dream Diaries* are useful in elaborating this phenomenon as they present a creative critique of a restorative nostalgia that underpinned the post-apartheid nation building exercise. Routledge press is publishing a version of this chapter in 2019 in a volume titled *Diverse Freedoms: The Afterlives and Transformations of Post-Transatlantic Bondages*.

Chapter Five: Suffering and Smiling: Antiblack Regimes of Looking

In exploring the performative repertoire of “suffering and smiling”, in this chapter, I consider how this repertoire fundamentally emanates from an antiblack regime of looking. Moreover, this chapter is a theoretical meditation on how poverty pornography consolidates antiblack looking and spectatorship. On this score I consider the work of Renzo Marten’s (2008) *Enjoy Poverty* and Ayana V. Jackson’s (2014), *Poverty Pornography* as examples of contemporary art in Africa that engages with antiblack modes of looking and enjoyment. Further, this chapter engages with the difficult and perhaps an unwanted argument that is put forward in Afropessimist literature, which posits that black abjection and by extension its visual representation are viable and necessary for non-black subject identity formation.

³⁶ “Visibility” is a term that distinctively emanates from the post-modern spectrum of visual culture, also known as visual studies, as foregrounded in Nicholas Mirzeoff’s seminal text *On Visibility* (1996) and in his expansive text *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (2002). In his definition of visibility, Mirzeoff consults the work of Hal Foster (1988) in *Vision and Visibility*.

Thus I grapple with Wilderson's (2010: 7)) idea in *Red White & Black* that black abjection and suffering are vital constituent of modern civil society, especially in its psychic offering of a relief factor for non-black spectators, through attending to its desires and identification. From here visual technology, for example film, video and photography, are explored, as media that stage a repetition and this aspect cannot be overstated. Notwithstanding the intentions of the artist or author, representation can be argued to facilitate repetitions and returns perhaps because the image attempts to stand in for the original act or perhaps because, as Marriott (2017) suggests, the image pays homage to the original scene, or as he further suggests, the image yearns to stage its own event in relation to the scene. My analytic perspective sharply foregrounds the aspect of spectatorship. I believe that by centralising spectatorship it underwrites the locus of enjoyment that structures the market and its concomitant libidinal economy particularly when it comes to images of Africa

Chapter Six: On Afrofuturism, Rainbowism and Anti-African Futures in South African Visual Culture

This chapter³⁷ is a focused critique of the restorative/prospective nostalgia of rainbowism³⁸ alongside the easy optimism of Afrofuturism that has taken flight in contemporary art practice. What is distinctive about South Africa's rainbowism is that it is underpinned by a post-racialism that ironically relies on recycling and refurbishing a familiar pathological image of Africa, both in its nostalgia for the past and in its nostalgia for the future. This chapter connects some of the ways that rainbowism as a nation-building project is consistent with Svetlana Boym's (2001) concept of restorative nostalgia. Afrofuturism is a temporal and aesthetic category that is able

³⁷In August 2017, I presented a modified version of chapter six as a paper "A Cruel Optimism: On Afrofuturism, Rainbowism and Afrophobic Futures" at a panel on nostalgia that I chaired at the ACASA conference of African Art. The conference was hosted by the University of Legon, Accra, in Ghana.

³⁸Rainbowism was a Desmond Tutu and a Nelson Mandela led nation-building project that was hatched after South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994.

to envisage a transcendent black futurity in a world that seems to pull black subjectivity into a perpetual cycle of violence and abjection. Further, Afrofuturism has a visual vocabulary that portrays the intersectional qualities of the anti-human, the pre-human and the post-human as they coalesce into a figure of blackness and its concomitant alterity. On this score, this chapter reads Gerald Machona's³⁹ Afrofuturist art work, *Vabvakure* (People from Far Away) against the episodes of xenophobic-Afrophobic violence that continue to characterize the time of post-apartheid South Africa.

The primary intention of this document is to confront difficult images in their own terms. The aim is to shed light on the various ways these images are consumed and to further unravel why this imagery is being consumed. The aim is not to take a moral stance in order to police the consumption of these images; I think it is enough to theoretically unravel the framework in which this phenomenon occurs in our current post-apartheid context. Further, to exclude imagery of black pain postures a sense of redress that implies as an alleviation of suffering. Notwithstanding the editorial decisions that I may or may not take in this thesis, the structural conditions that create and preserve black abjection continue on autopilot unabated. The act of excluding certain images does not obstruct the conditions that maintain their creation. The fundamental issue here, or rather the moral decision does not rest on whether one looks at the image or not. The more difficult aspect to grasp is the false dichotomy or the false choice that taking the decision to extract the imagery creates, as it affirms an escape route, a way out. I believe this is what Frank Wilderson (2017: 56) points out when he states that, "most people in the world, are not willing to engage in a paradigm of oppression that does not offer some type of way out. But that is what we live with as black people every day."

³⁹Gerald Machona is a Zimbabwean artist who lives and practises in South Africa.

CHAPTER TWO: ARCHIVAL ART

Do we look with eyes, or with the psyche?

(Hortense Spillers, *Black, White and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*, 2006)

How does one revisit the scene of subjection without replicating the grammar of violence? Is the “terrible beauty” that resides in such a scene something akin to a remedy as Fred Moten would seem to suggest? The kind of terrible beauty and terrible music that he discerns in Aunt Hester’s screams transformed into songs of the Great House Farm or in the photograph of Emmet Till’s destroyed face and the “acuity of regard” which arises from a willingness to look into the open casket. Do the possibilities outweigh the dangers of looking (again)?

(Saidiya Hartman, *Venus in Two Acts*, 2008)

2. ARCHIVAL ART AND THE TEMPORAL TURN

The socio-political transition by way of 1994 set in motion a discursive vocabulary on temporality, which has found expression in art discourse. In the words of Stephen Frosh (2015:10), post-apartheid temporality is indexed by a simultaneity of accelerations and apparent slow-downs. “The reversals of history co-exist alongside periods of stasis, repetition, nostalgia and retroaction”.

This chapter’s point of departure is a three-way junction between nostalgia, archival art and black subjectivity. Twenty-five years into the project of post-apartheid South Africa, the passage of time continues to be neurotically used as a device to measure how far we have moved from the primal scenes of the past. The prefix “post” signifies a “new” South Africa and the arrival of the future. From 1999⁴⁰, at the turn of the century, terms such as “post-transitionality” and “post

⁴⁰In their paper, “Conceptualizing Post-Transitional South African Literature”, Ronit Frenkel and Craig Mackenzie (2010) discuss key temporal terms such as ‘post-transitional’ and ‘post post-apartheid’. Although Frenkel and Mackenzie’s paper uses examples in South African literary studies, it is worth noting that in an informative way

post-apartheid” entered the discursive lexicon beckoning the newness of future formations (Frenckel and Mackenzie 2010:3). In sharp contradiction to this linear narrative of the future, apartheid visual scenes remain writ large in the post-apartheid visual imaginary reminding us about the unfinished business of the past.

2.1 THE INTERPELLATION OF THE BLACK SUBJECT-OBJECT: THE VISUAL ARCHIVE AS A SITE OF IDENTITY FORMATION

Archival discourse constitutes a large body of theory that stretches across numerous academic fields and scholarly disciplines. The vast accumulation of knowledge on and around the archive is extensive to the point where the concept of the “archive” is distinguished by its opaque ambiguity; as Derrida (1995:4) notes, “nothing is less clear today than the word ‘archive’”. The diversification of information, technology and digital media has made it difficult for a standard dictionary definition of the archive to hold.” In “Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines”, Manoff (2004:11) highlights the important fact that “Archival discourse has also become a way of addressing some of the thorny issues of disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge production and the artificial character of disciplinary boundaries”. For the purposes of my thesis, I use the term “archive” through a lens that focuses more on its creative and imaginative facets and less on the administrative and bureaucratic perspective of archival work. A creative focus opens up a fresh approach to archival discourse, primarily because it takes into account the fabrication of stereotypes, fiction and the fantasies written and imaged in imperial archival discourse. My argument takes seriously the implicit understanding of the archive as a site of knowledge production, especially as a site where identities are created and designed. This aspect is suggested in Carolyn Hamilton’s *Refiguring the Archive* (Hamilton et al. 2002:9), in this thesis I elaborate

their cautious unpacking of the significance of these two terms has relevance within the broader cultural scope that is inclusive of the visual art. Further, while the terms ‘post-transitional’ and post post-apartheid can be read as temporal markers that speak of and describe cultural activity in the present, it is important we stay cautious about using them in a premature and universalising manner that effaces difference and complexity (Magubane 2005:129).

on the idea of the archive as “a site and as a sight” of identity interpellation⁴¹, where people are designated and organised into groups. I use the term “site” to refer to the archive as a place, although not exclusively as a physical and material place, but as a temporal space where knowledge is formed, in this instance through art and selected media images. This knowledge is produced through the “the institutionalisation of the stereotypical sign” that is converted by the archive into a positivist matter of fact (Marriot 2015:166). The foundational role that archives play in the production of modern epistemology cannot be overstated, to echo Manoff (2004:13):

Some scholars have argued that the archive functions for the humanities and social science disciplines as the laboratory functions for the sciences. Both the archive and the laboratory are sites of knowledge production.

Consequently, in settler colonial contexts such as South Africa, the colonial archive implies the monopoly of knowledge and more specifically the colonisation of what constitutes knowledge. This in turn, bolsters the Foucauldian idea of the archive as a law that governs what can be said, what has been said, dictating about whom knowledge is exercised (Foucault in Simon 2011:102). The archive in this framework represents an exercise of power and access. In a colonial setting, knowledge is exercised against the colonised. According to Hamilton et al. (2003:10), post-apartheid archival discourse has failed to trouble these colonial and apartheid positivist assumptions and claims. With this in mind, this chapter proposes that archival art may offer a differing set of possibilities: possibilities that are capable of releasing different kinds of information about the past, the present and the future. The visual archive is often relied upon as a source in archival art practice mainly for its definitive pictorial features and aesthetics. This aspect becomes integral to my discussions on the identity formation of black subjectivity, as what is

⁴¹ I borrow this term from Marxist theory, as articulated by Louis Althusser (1971) in his work, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)*. Interpellation describes the manner in which ideology is embedded in social and political institutions. I use this term to denote the imperial archive in the Global South as an ideological institution of memory that has historically constructed and embedded the image of African subjects as phobogenic.

definitive about antiblackness begins from the visual plane. Ideas and observations about antiblackness are communicated through visual cues, symbols and stereotypes (Berger 2003). It is in the act of looking, the frame of vision and sight where the black subject is known. It is in the process of “epidermalisation” where his or her inferiority is identified; Fanon (2008) further insists that it is colour that seals the “Black” into a “crushing objecthood”. This brings to the fore the utility of the gaze in the constitution of objecthood by way of the archive. Huey Copeland (2011:85) articulates this aspect convincingly when they write:

Indeed the specular and panoptic modes of seeing constituted the enslaved. On the one hand, it meant to display their abjection through an obscene violence, on the other to maintain their subjection through omnipresent surveillance—have been integral to the evolving production of the racialized body as a knowable site whose very being is not just revealed in the skin, but rooted in the flesh.

The black subject becomes visible in a particular way, determining that it can only be knowable in a particular way (even to ourselves) and therefore killable in a particular way (Weheliye 2016). When confronted by this regime the black spectator is faced with the image of his or her negation and abjection. Put differently, the archive is the epistemological hotbed where epidermal myths and fantasies are imaged and legitimated. Moreover, it is the source where the antiblack gaze is configured. This is a gaze that constructs the ‘imago of the negro’ as a phobogenic object. In the chapter “The Negro and Psychopathology”. Fanon (2008:117) uses psychoanalysis in order to interpret the myths underpinning the process that he identifies as “negro-phobogenesis” which directly implicate black masculinity. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon (1952, 2008), describes the negro as a phobogenic object. In other words, in a white world, the Negro seen as a stimulus for anxiety and fear. The phobogenic status of the black masculinity renders him overdetermined as an object endowed with “evil intentions and malefic powers” (1952, 2008). I use this term in order to understand the representational process under which the miners were

visually framed as threatening and violent by the media apparatus and therefore deserving of their fate. What is particularly of interest is his awareness of cultural artefacts, documents, their statements and the role they play in the imaging of the black as phobogenic:

In other words, there is a constellation of postulates, a series of propositions that slowly work and subtly – with the help of books, newspapers, schools and their texts, advertisements, films, radio – work their way into one’s mind and shape one’s view of the world of the group to which one belongs.

Whilst Fanon (2008: 118) does not list a specific cultural apparatus in archival terms, this list consists of visual documents and visual media which convey visual statements that veil the black body, “as fetish, phobia, stereotype” in the process of producing the imago (Marriot 2008:164). The “phobogenic imago” plays out like a recurring scene, a racist fantasy in a loop, fixated on the motif of the black body in a state of abjection. There are countless examples of its occurrence in the visual economy. Derek Hook (2014: 48) critically points out that the concrete actuality of this violence is contingent to racist fantasy. The persistence of these occurrences is woven within the fabric of a larger social fantasy, which effectively restores the gaze of Fanon’s (2008) description in *Black Skin, White Masks*. At a global scale, in public culture, the image of black body in pain is both sacred and profane. A quintessential example is the Pulitzer winning image shown in Figure 2, taken by the South African photographer Kevin Carter. The picture ominously depicts a vulture stalking an emaciated child, crippled by famine in Southern Sudan. In chapter five, I explore how this image is appropriated and taken up by Ayana V. Jackson in her artwork *Poverty Pornography* that was exhibited alongside Archival Impulse in 2014.



Figure 2. Kevin Carter, *Vulture and the little girl*, 1993

The image received global success and circulation; its iconic status was not limited to the media and the press, in art production it inspired and paved the path for the internationally coveted work of the Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar (2009) *The Sound of Silence* and *Real Pictures*. In his installations, *The Sound of Silence* and *Real Pictures* Jaar comments on visual representation of violence. The genocide that happened in Rwanda in 1994 and Kevin Carter's photograph of the "Vulture and the Little Girl" are his most prominent case studies respectively. Jaar was moved to create these installations because of the indifferent attitude of the media and the international community to suffering (Mekouar 2016). In *Real Pictures* Jaar⁴² privileges the written text as his medium of representation. By positioning the written word as an image in and of itself, the written text takes the place of the photograph depicting death and suffering.

⁴² The filmmaker Claude Lanzmann (1985) adopts a similar method in his production of *Shoah*, a documentary.

In *Real Pictures* Alfredo Jaar uses text as image without reproducing a single photograph depicting the over-familiar carnage and gore of the genocide in Rwanda (Ranciere 2011:97). This move could be interpreted as a progressive stance as it denies the spectator the perverse pleasure of looking and consuming images of death and suffering. Where the photograph compromises dignity, using text as an image becomes a method of preserving dignity. However, this is not always the case, especially when one considers the instructive and consequential power of the photograph of Emmett Till's⁴³ open casket, which interestingly resonates with the photograph of Steve Biko's open casket. Both images emerge directly from the context of antiblack violence. In *Biko's Ghost: Iconography of Black Consciousness*, Shannen Hill argues that both images are akin in that they primarily aim to instruct viewers to take action (2015:66). They paradoxically aim to resist being trapped in a passive relationship with viewers (Ranciere 2011:86). The question raised in this chapter is not so much concerned with what these images compel us to do, but it is more concerned with the living legacy of relations from where they emerge and flourish.

The *mis en scène* of maimed black bodies punctures through periodic closures of time. Although the following scenes are unrelated in terms of their immediate socio-political events that bring about their occurrence. It is the visual over-accessibility of black suffering that interests that evokes the libidinal investments of fears, desires and fantasies that constitute the gratuitous violence of the antiblack fantasy.

For instance full frontal views of suffering are associated with Africa, are deeply engrained into the psychic imagination of the public this association is suggested by Susan Sontag (2003:63), in *Regarding the Pain of Others*. In *Ontological Terror: Blackness Nihilism and Emancipation*, Calvin Warren (2018:2) explicitly encapsulates the pervasive power of this global sadism when he

43 It is worth noting that Emmett Till's "open casket" and the photographic reproductions of it led to the bus boycott during the civil rights movement in 1955 and Steve Biko's horrific death under police custody and his open casket exposing his wounds, had an immense impact on the internationalisation of the Black Consciousness movement. The recent re-emergence of the abolition arguments (abolishing the normative structural conditions of black precarity/disposability/death) these arguments have been reignited into mainstream activism and discourse following the video streamed lynching of George Floyd. This suggests meaning and more importantly the impact of these images is not monolithic, they don't only re-present and re-mediate pain but also amongst other things ignite activism.

describes that we live in “a world of antiblack brutality, a world in which black torture, dismemberment, fatality and fracturing are routinized and ritualized- a global sadistic pleasure principle”

It is with this consciousness in mind that we can situate graphic photographs of brown flesh hacked to death in Rwanda made memorable by *Time* magazine’s August cover in 1994 titled “This is the beginning of the final days, this is the apocalypse”⁴⁴; the front page images of bullet ridden bodies in Marikana corpses stacked on top of each other in Haiti⁴⁵ and more recently in Garissa⁴⁶; bodies decrepit with starvation in Biafra⁴⁷ and in a state of capture in Chibok⁴⁸. Here I recall these disasters in the visual patterns of their mediation. According to Frank Wilderson (2010), black bodies magnetise bullets; footage of black men gunned down by the police is shared all across social media. Although this is not an exhaustive list, these scenes are all pervading.

They burgeon in both physical and figurative realms. Post-apartheid South Africa has its generous share of this recurring spectre in its visual economy. Who could forget the televised shooting of Andries Tatane and the burning flesh of Ernesto Nhamuave⁵⁰, set aflame during the 2008 Afrophobic spectacle of violence? Andries Tatane was a 33-year-old South African activist, whose death was televised when he was beaten and shot by the police during a service delivery protest in Ficksburg, South Africa in 2011. The police officers who were accused of his assault and murder were acquitted. Andries Tatane’s televised death, at the hand of police brutality in

⁴⁴ The Rwandan genocide took place between March and July 1994 (Mamdani 2002). In Mamdani’s introduction to *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and Genocide in Rwanda* he states that estimates of those who were killed varied: between ten and fifty thousand Hutu, and between 500,000 and a million Tutsi. Furthermore Mamdani (2002) explains that whereas the Hutu were killed as individuals, the Tutsi were killed as a group.

⁴⁵ In 2010, a devastating earthquake occurred in Haiti, killing more than 300 000 people. What sets Haiti slightly apart in the list is that it was caused by a natural disaster. However, that is not the point. What is worth noting is the visual display in which photojournalistic media used in rendering of this disaster, it comprises of the full frontal exposure of mangled up and destroyed black people. This is not generally the same for white bodies, white bodies are generally afforded a type of dignity that is absent in the case of dead black bodies see Susan Sontag’s (2002) argument in *Regarding the Pain of Others*.

⁴⁶ In 2015, the graphic images of slain students in Garissa, Kenya were circulated in the media coverage.

⁴⁷ In the media, the name Biafra has become synonymous with famine. Iconic award winning photographs were captured of what has now become the recurrent trope of Africa; the malnourished child with stick thin limbs and a distended stomach (www.iconicphotographs.com accessed 24 July 2016)

⁴⁸ In April 2014, 230 schoolgirls were kidnapped in Chibok, Nigeria and sold into sex slavery. This event and manner of which it was covered normalises the state of capture and violence historically inflicted on black bodies.

⁵⁰ Ernesto Nhamuave was a Mozambican national who was burnt to death during the Afrophobic protests in 2008. An image of him set alight was circulated prolifically in national and global media following his death.

2011 can be interpreted as a precursor to the Marikana massacre in 2012, an act of police brutality on a massive scale

Ernesto Nhamuave was a Mozambican national who was burnt to death during the Afrophobic protests in 2008. An image of him set alight was circulated prolifically in national and global media following his death. The abovementioned is a litany of actual events that have been recorded and reproduced via multiple representational schemas including in graphic design. Moreover it is the aesthetic uptake of Nhamuave's death that is of interest. The image (Fig 2.1) of Nhamuave engulfed by flames later surfaces as a graphic design logo for an arts festival Programme *Infecting the City* in 2009 (Fig. 2.2). How does the photograph of Nhamuave burning to death become subject of a graphic design logo for an arts festival?



Figure 2.1. Halden Krog. Ernesto Nhamuave engulfed in flames in Ramaphosa Settlement Johannesburg, 2008

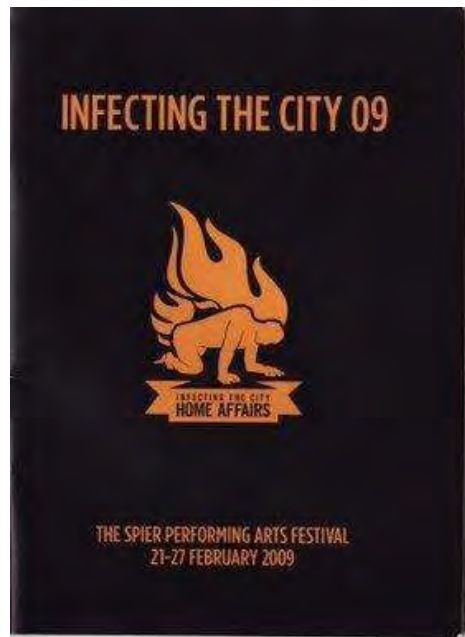


Figure 2.2: The front-page design of the Infecting the City programme 2009



Figure 2.3. The back page design of *Infecting the city* programme, 2009

An image of an orange cockroach (Fig 2.3) is centred on the back cover of the same programme. In an online, article “Infection? Roach? Burning Foreign National?” Robert Sloon (2006) commented on this design, “It seems strange to make an association between infections, roaches and Ernesto Nhamuave’s tragic death”. This thesis argues such visual arrangements are not strange, rather they can be read in a legible way as part of the living past.

One of the key objectives of this thesis is to understand how the aesthetic and creative uptake of this material operates in the symbolic⁵¹ and how this material jointly productive and embedded within the material actuality of this violence.

Further, my approach draws pointedly from Fanon’s (2008) analysis and conclusions in *Black Skin, White Masks*. I use a Fanonian psychoanalytic paradigm as a methodological tool in order to comprehend the psychic structure of settler-colonial modernity and the subjectivities it reproduces. More importantly, this thesis demonstrates an application of this theory in a selected body of imagery produced in post-apartheid South Africa. Psychoanalysis under Fanon’s amendments⁵² in *Black Skin, White Masks*, lays out the tools that one uses to identify the fantasies that are conjured in the visual matrix of settler colonial power. Fanon puts forward that the beginning of this process is catalysed through the family structure that in many regards works as a miniature version of the nation state:

As the child emerges from the shadow of his parents, he finds himself once more among the laws, the same principles, the same values, a normal child that has grown up in a normal family will be a normal man...But this is a most important

⁵¹ The “symbolic” forms as part of the “imaginary, symbolic and real” triad as it is conceptualized by Jacques Lacan (Lacan in Wright 1992). According to (Wright 1992:173) the Imaginary is primarily narcissistic and primordial stage that is associated with the mirror stage. It is based on the visual representation of that we gain by seeing ourselves as an object, images that cover the veiled object that promises jouissance. The Symbolic refers to stage where one enters and accepts the dictates of language, the words (signifiers) that we use to understand the world. The Real is what Lacan suggests creates the subconscious it is the remnants of our pre-symbolic reality, our pre-language selves. The real is nothing, it is unconceptualised, it comes out when language cannot be formed to explain it – primal fear and dreams are examples of the real (Wright 1992:375). In referring to this psychoanalytical triad it is important that we historicize it, as it doesn’t function universally to everyone on equal terms even though it presumes a universal application, in its universal presumptions its disavows race and antiblackness. In her essay “Is the Mirror Racist: Interrogating the Space of Whiteness” Winnibust (2004) brings our attention to this dynamic, when she argues that the Lacan’s “symbolic” affirms the power of bodies primarily signified as male and white. Which is why it is important to use Frantz Fanon as he is acutely aware of how Lacan’s symbolic is Eurocentric in the way that it centres white subjectivity.

⁵² In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon (1952, 2008) amends psychoanalysis from its Freudian and Lacanian origins in order to make it applicable to the antiblack social structure that produces a type of neurosis and sociogeny in the black psyche. This neurosis happens as a direct result of having internalised the terms of a racist social structure (Hook and Truscott 2013:2).

point—we observe the opposite with the man of colour. A normal Negro child, having grown up within a normal family, will become abnormal on the slightest contact with the white world (Fanon 2008:111).

Upon contact with the world, the white world, the black subject's humanity is negated, that is to say that blacks are rendered as a problem that requires fixing and fixture, and I am echoing W.E.B Du Bois's (1903) thoughts in *The Souls of Black Folk* here. Later in this document, in chapter five, "Suffering and Smiling", I discuss how technology plays a vital role in this aspect. The camera becomes a technological device that fixes and preserves this phobogenic-imago. "Dirty Nigger!" or simply, "Look, a Negro!". This sentence opens the fifth chapter, "The Fact of Blackness" in *Black Skin, White Masks*, an essential text. The power of this sentence lies in the litany of visual metaphors it instantly conjures at its enunciation. In one sweep, it unravels at multiple dimensions; namely the look of the white gaze and the association of black with abjection: dirt (Foster 1993:1). The instruction to look, declares the moment of recognition that blackness is seen, identifiable or rather negated in the first instance through sight, the instruction is to look suggests that corporeality; the flesh is the primary signifier of blackness. Secondly, this sight of recognition lays out the primal scene of subject/object formation; it connotes the violence predisposed in its imposition. Fanon (2008:84) articulates the neurosis that reflects the predetermined limits concomitant with being imprisoned in the "racial epidermal schema".

The disembodiment process of having to look at oneself through the lenses of whiteness is initially captured in the writing of W.E.B Du Bois's, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). He conceives a notion called double consciousness, "Of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity ... the sense of always seeing oneself through the eyes of others". Du Bois's descriptions of this procedure rely heavily on the metaphors of visibility, particularly when he writes about how Negroes have a second sight (Du Bois 1903:2). This world only grants blacks to see themselves through the revelations of the world outside of themselves, through the

eyes of others. He uses the metaphor of the veil, (which operates like the stereotype) where beneath the veil you can see the world gazing at you, however the world cannot see the individual self or rather, and the world refuses to see the self beyond the cloak of the veil. Therefore, the veil renders the subject ultimately invisible⁵³. It is as Ralph Ellison's narrator declares (1952: 7) in *Invisible Man*:

I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fibre and liquids – and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible; understand, simply because people refuse to see me.... Mirrors of hard, distorting glass have surrounded me. When they approach, they see only my surroundings, themselves or figments of their imagination – indeed, everything and anything except me.

Racial invisibility stands as one of the pillars of black aesthetics as it speaks directly to the visual method by which blacks are denied personhood, and this method unfolds through the white gaze, or rather the antiblack gaze. In “The Fact of Blackness”, *Frantz Fanon* (2008) explains that this negation occurs not only in the first and second person, but additionally in a third person consciousness, “I exist triply,” he declares. This occurs when he has encountered ‘the other’ and realises that he has to construct his identity out of what has already been a predetermined path for him. Paul C. Taylor (2016:40) explains this disembodiment process more incisively:

The speaker (i) sees the other (ii) seeing him, and (iii) sees himself doing this, and becomes undone as a result.

He is predetermined from without. The mechanical disembodied feeling comes from having existed with oneself and then suddenly coming into contact with a white gaze, which not only rejects you as a person but also forces upon you phobogenic characteristics and histories that you must not only be burdened with, but you are coerced to accept. The white gaze becomes the

⁵³ Racial invisibility is explored by Ralph Ellison (1952) in his tome, *Invisible Man*. Invisibility has become a theoretical idiom in black aesthetics.

objective mediator of the black “self” or its assumed lack thereof in its encounter in the antiblack world. The white gaze throws the notion of black being into crises. As Warren (2018:146) suggests in the chapter “Catachrestic Fantasies: Seeing and Not Seeing Playtime” that in the white world, black subjectivity cannot be seen ontologically and seeing “translates into not seeing”. To further iterate Warren (2018:14), the eyes are not the organ for this type of seeing, echoing Hortense Spiller’s (2006) conundrum, “do we look with our eyes or with our psyche?” In this dissertation, I will unpack the sadomasochistic aesthetics of archival art that give credence to Fanon’s lamentations. “My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recoloured, clad in mourning in that white winter day.” (Fanon 2008:86).

Blackness is only legitimately knowable in the corporeal schema; it is knowable through the violence that predetermines its possibilities. My argument in this dissertation places emphasis on the fact that this epistemological formation is dependent on a regime of looking and enjoyment. In *Black is Beautiful: A Philosophy of Black Aesthetics*, the author, Paul C. Taylor (2016:40) unpacks the technical dynamic of this structure:

The “objective” gaze is the whitely gaze, inviting the speaker in Fanon’s essay to see himself, as Dubois puts it, through the eyes of others. But it is also a source of a third layer of complexity, on which to paraphrase Lacan⁵⁴, the speaker (i) sees the Other (ii) seeing him, and (iii) sees himself doing this, and becomes undone as a result.

In settler colonial contexts, the violence and trauma of the primal scene is often repeated and restaged in a range of actual and metaphoric ways, including in cultural practice. The primal scene is a natal occasion, a generative act equivalent to the statement “I was born” (Moten 2003:3).

⁵⁴ The reference to Lacanian terms such as “the libidinal”, “the gaze” and “jouissance” in this thesis is indirect, more emphatically it is used specifically through its calibrated and transformed iterations in Afro-pessimist thought, Frantz Fanon and black studies in general, not directly through Lacan, as Lacan was not conceptualizing these ideas in relation to how they operate within an antiblack schema of representation. Black study fills this gap of the antiblack unthought, not Lacan. The indirect use of Lacan in this thesis echoes Shannon Winnibust’s (2004:4) argument where she states that “epistemologically, Lacan’s account of ego-formation is an historically and culturally specific account that, in claiming itself universal, enacts its own whiteness (and maleness and heterosexuality, as feminists have shown)”. In feminist literature one can read and understand Lacanian thought and the ways it is synthesized in feminist film studies via Laura Mulvey (1975), without having to engage the whole of Lacan’s oeuvre as a precondition to accessing Laura Mulvey (1975).

The role of the gaze is critical in consolidating a deeper understanding of this formation. The notion of the primal scene is useful, particularly because it enables us to comprehend its composition. The primal scene occurs before the oedipal complex. Governed by a visual economy of witnessing and voyeurism, it refers to the first time a child witnesses his/her two parents having sexual intercourse. Paralysed by a mixture of feelings upon the aftermath of this sighting, the child is left with conflicting feelings, including trauma and betrayal and more curiously, this sighting provokes sexual arousal in the child, which subsequently triggers the oedipal complexity. In *Scenes of Subjection*, Hartman (1993) locates the primal scene to the savage yet sexualised beating of Aunt Hester, witnessed by Frederick Douglass as a child. Douglass describes this experience as the “the blood stained gate”, a threshold that gives way to his formation as a slave. The quotation below can be understood as an elementary metaphor that articulates a trauma-inducing encounter with the white world that Fanon refers. Douglass experiences this scene vicariously, as a child; his presence as a bystander, looking in is both an active and passive framing of him as a psychic participant in this cruel spectacle:

I remember the first time I ever witnessed the horrible exhibition. I was quite a child, but I well remember it. I never shall forget it whilst I remember anything it was the first of a long series of such outrages of which I was doomed to be a witness and a participant. It struck men with awful force. It was the bloodstained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery, through which I was about to pass. It was a most terrible spectacle. I wish I could commit to paper the feelings with which I beheld it (Douglass 1895:05).

Douglass witnesses the terrible spectacle⁵⁵ at the same time and place as it unfolds. In the narration and reiteration, I suggest that readers, like spectators are correspondingly placed in a similar position. The narration in the text opens up a metaphoric peephole to the spectacle that we,

⁵⁵ Violence is used as a method of maintaining that order. Frederick Douglass (1986:51) describes a bloody scene at the plantation, when his aunt Hester got whipped by the vicious overseer, Mr Plummer “The louder she screamed the harder he whipped; and where the blood ran the fastest, there he whipped the longest. He would whip to make her scream, and whip her to make her hush; and not until overcome by fatigue, would he cease to swing the blood clotted cow skin.”

although arguably uncoerced, nonetheless like Douglass, become witnesses. Aunt Hester's ravaged body gives formation of the narrator's black identity and it consolidates his position as a slave, as a black object/subject uncannily resonating with Fanon's (2008:86) body given back to him "sprawled, distorted and recoloured, clad in mourning". For the coherency of my argument, I put forward that visual archive functions like a metaphoric whipping post where we are invited to huddle and participate along the ambiguous lines of witness-spectator.

It can be argued that scopophilia "a pleasure in looking" work hand in hand with the process of identity formation/negation, as it is implicated within this sadistic visual apparatus. Scopophilia is a term used in psychoanalysis and in feminist film studies by way of Laura Mulvey (1975) in her text "Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema". In her text, Mulvey traces scopophilia back to Sigmund Freud's *Three Essays on Sexuality* where he describes scopophilia as the act of taking other people as objects and subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze (Freud in Mulvey 1975:59). Scopophilia has a sexual dimension in that the pleasure derived is erotic, suggesting that there can be sexual gratification derived from the objectification of a person. While for Mulvey, it is the form of cinema that she is critiquing, however her argument can be tweaked and adjusted to apply to our looking relations with the visual archive in a general sense.

There is pleasure that can be derived from gazing into "the cruel spectacle" such as the one that gives formation to the narrators identity in Douglass's, this action can be fulfilled in the visual archive too. Put differently, this primordial wish to enjoy looking intermingles with a desire to see likeness, recognition and ultimately the formation of the ego, the "'I of subjectivity". On the other hand, it is important to note that while the image, screen, the visual can establish and reinforce the ego, it can also diminish the "I", allowing for "a temporary" loss of the ego, a loss of subjectivity and the self. In this sense, while for others the cruel spectacle can be generative for an ego formation, for the black subject spectator/witness, it opens up the experience of negation and Loss. The visual archive is a source artists perpetually return to in their creative quest to make

important interventions that comment about the past and the present. For instance, in *Looking Forward: Looking Black*, Christina Sharpe (1999) makes a strong case about the positive aspects of this process, when she writes on the work of the artist Kara Walker, particularly her use of the archive of slavery in her famous art silhouettes. Sharpe (1999:43) claims that in her engagement with the archive Walker forces her viewers to contend with the libidinal investments that other people would prefer to remain repressed and buried. Suggesting that the act may facilitate an “exorcising of racist fantasies”. The boundaries between the two easily become unclear and ambiguous, creating a space of uncertainty for both the artist and his/her spectators, particularly when we seriously consider the aesthetic sensibilities that make these images coherent as art. As Sharpe (1999:43) notes, “There is definitely a lot of pleasure in their reproducing of these images; the beauty of the images attests to that”. It is in this space of pleasure where I begin to connect the role that nostalgia plays in these recollections of a gruesome past that is repackaged into a palatable scene. However perhaps it is precisely in the aesthetic realm where this sadomasochistic power relation can be effectively explored and understood better. Sharpe (1999:43) includes a powerful quote by Kara Walker when she comments on her success. This quote is worth reiterating here as it evokes the centrality of repetition to this (sadomasochistic) aesthetic that is a by-product of archival art practice:

To achieve success as an African-American, one must spill ones guts constantly – like the old sharecropper in Ellison’s *Invisible Man* who raped his daughter and kept telling his horrible story over and over, and the white people in the town gave him things. He is an embarrassment to the educated Blacks and a fascination to the whites.

This phenomenon of repetition is not limited to the African American context. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate how it is implicated even in South African contemporary art practice; even at a disciplinary level, we see a type of loop effect when it comes to representation around the black subject/object and the archive.

2.2 TEMPORALITY AND TECHNOLOGY: NOSTALGIA'S DEVICES

This thesis predominantly gravitates towards the media of photography and film although not exclusively so, as I do pay attention to installations and performance in later chapters. More than any other medium, the photograph stands out as a “slice of a time and place” that is always from the past relaying messages in the present (Baetens et al 2010:7). In the words of Barthes (1984:15), “cameras in short were clocks for seeing”. My discussion on photography, particularly portraiture, introduces the idea of a scopic regime of settler modernity and the various ways that it (in) visibilises the black subject. Photography coalesces multiple temporal modes and this makes it an ideal object of nostalgic recall. The photograph images the dimension of what has been: the past. This means that it is *a priori* an archival object; it serves as a visual testament of the existence of what is taken for granted as ‘fact’, photos represent an excess of the seen (Enwezor 2008:12). As a result, the practice of archival art naturally gravitates towards this medium of representation. The advent of photography and the moving image, film, represent a seminal moment for the archive of settler colonial modernity. “[Photography’s] capacity for accurate description and their ability to establish distinct relations of time and event, image and statement, have come to define the terms of archival production...[b]ecause the camera is literally an archiving machine” (Enwezor 2008:12). Owing to the purported accuracy of the photograph, its truth claims promptly render it as fact that is equivalent to the positivism of science.

The technological objectivity of the camera as a recording device is sanctioned to record the ‘fact’ of racial difference (Fusco 2003:16). My argument closely follows Coco Fusco’s (2003), premise in *Only Skin Deep* that rather than recording race, photography produces race as a visualisable fact. The camera becomes an accomplice in the violent translation of the fantasy into the life world of veritable facts. In the context of settler modernity, the camera is an extension of the all-seeing, omnipresent eye of the white gaze; the eye of God, a gaze that enjoys the exclusive privilege of seeing without being seen (hooks 1995:31). One cannot overstate the critical

significance of enjoyment within this paradigm. The furtive pleasure embedded in the voyeuristic practice of seeing without being seen is paramount to this understanding. To echo Althusser (1971:154), the reproduction of these relations, or in other words, the reproductions of the relations of exploitation, are not limited to repressive apparatuses alone. The systemic use of photography was not restricted to the pursuit of scientific truths (Fusco 2003:19). It has played a fundamental part in coalescing pleasure and desire within the structure of the gaze that falls on the violent primal scene. The practice of archival art amplifies our understanding and discernment of how pleasure coheres in this configuration.

Photographs are ritual substances that channel a return; a repetition, a non-forgetting, they haunt. They are, as Hook (2014:70) describes, a sum of multiple concurrent temporal modes. At every appearance, they invite participation; they demand the presence of a spectatorship. It is in the question of spectatorship that this thesis elaborates on the complexity of sadomasochistic enjoyment that is heightened by the aesthetic regiment of art practice. Spectators are aligned and positioned to admire and enjoy reiterated ‘scenes of suffering’. In *Scenes of Subjection*, Saidiya V. Hartman (1997: 8) suggests that the crimes of slavery have an afterlife; one could say the same for colonialism and apartheid in South Africa. These crimes were not only witnessed but they were also staged. She further affirms, “The constitution of blackness as an abject and degraded condition and the fascination with the other’s enjoyment went hand in hand”. In her analysis, the primal scene is a generative act that dramatizes the origins of the subject; by the same logic, in my argument I have connected how scopophilia and a subject formation/negation work as an intertwined couplet embedded within the visual regime. The bystander-witness watches the cruel spectacle, but does not stop the event, nor suspend his/her gaze as it unfurls into the fray of the scene.

2.3 THE NOSTALGIC TURN

In South Africa the experience of modernity is a traumatic and violent one, as a direct result of modernity being imposed through the extreme violence of settler colonialism (Reddy 2016: 4). Modern progress produces what Abdul Jan Mohamed identifies as death bound subjectivity (Abdul Jan Mohamed in Gordon 2010:206). “Art which describes or responds to trauma always embodies paradox. How can aesthetic criteria be applied to describe the torture and mass destruction of our own kind?” Marcus Wood’s (2001) words are poignant in this regard; the paradox, he points out, draws us towards a conundrum revolving around the aesthetic uptake of human pain and suffering. For instance, how does the practice of archival art translate in a transitional context like post-apartheid South Africa with a past that is saturated in violence, and a present that is marked by an indescribable trauma? One may start by acknowledging that post-apartheid temporality, in its everyday manifestation is characterised by historical dissonance.

In *(Post) Apartheid Conditions: Psychoanalysis and Social Formation*, Hook (2014) alludes to this: “South African experience is characterized by historical dissonance, by the continuous juxtaposition of forward and backward looking temporalities”. Enter nostalgia, a curious sentiment traditionally understood as a fond yearning for the past. How do we account for this phenomenon in the contemporary imaginative realm and what does it tell us of our relationship to the past and the present. Nostalgia finds a fertile home in post-apartheid visual culture, moreover it is an aspect that remains under-theorised and it is therein that this dissertation makes a unique contribution into current scholarship in the discipline of art history and visual culture.

My argument emphasises the contingent pleasure of nostalgic memory practice. I examine the proximity that nostalgic memory practice has with the creative and aesthetic techniques of archival art production. Nonetheless, I argue that the intersection of nostalgia and archival art is insightful, as far as it makes vivid the perverse notion that a sadomasochistic pleasure restores the stability of an apartheid-psychic life and subject formation. My argument takes seriously the notion that racism and racial identification can be reproduced through pleasure in the form of scopophilia,

or insinuated in the bold claim that “racism is pleasure” as stated by Anthony Farley in *The Black Body as a Fetish Object* (1997: 458).

The nostalgic repetition of the black phobogenic imago in art practice is not subdued by the passage of time and the formal demise of apartheid. In fact, the frequencies of its retroactivity ricochet into the post-apartheid present, alerting us to the historical dissonance that typifies the psychic space of post-apartheid temporality. In *(Post) Apartheid*⁵⁶ *Conditions: Psychoanalysis and Social Formation*, Derek Hook (2014) connects post-apartheid temporality to the notion of psychical time and its contingencies to regression, fixation and repetition. Hook’s critique is primarily located in a psychic domain where white South Africa exhibits symptoms of a melancholia triggered by the loss of apartheid ideals and objects. The nostalgia that is evoked by Hook pertains primarily to white South Africa’s libidinal attachment to the “hateful object”. “The overriding complexity to this ‘moral’ regression undercuts mainstream ethical-political considerations namely because this melancholic attachment is not a question of a conscious – or moral – choice.” (Hook 2014:169).

The struggle of identifying against apartheid is not an exclusive limitation of white South Africa, in *Native Nostalgia*, Jacob Dlamini (2009) points towards a similar discordant strand in black South Africa. In *Native Nostalgia* (2009) when he poses the question, “what does it mean to remember life under apartheid with fondness?” Dlamini takes issue with the commonplace assumption of post-apartheid discourse, which proclaims that black South Africans have no happy memories of the past, specifically the apartheid past. I use Jacob Dlamini’s contention as a starting point to examine the idea of post-apartheid nostalgia. When one condenses this question to its essentials, what is being queried is the relationship between the black subject and time. What does it mean to be nostalgic while black in the post-apartheid present? This thesis is interested in the

⁵⁶ Hook inserts brackets into the prefix of (Post) Apartheid, to signal the ambiguity that defines the current ‘post-apartheid’ period. The bracketing of the prefix (Post) “must be read both as a definitive break from and also as a sub-category of the apartheid past”.

distinctive psychological inferences contingent to the use of nostalgia as psychoanalytical as an entry into the recesses of post-apartheid black subjectivity.

2.4 BLACK SUBJECTIVITY AS NON-CHRONOLOGICAL

Black subjectivity as non-chronological is particularised by the status of black subjectivity as cast out of humanity. This loss of human status is directly and indirectly a result of being exiled from time and place. Kara Keeling (2008) advances the idea that black subjectivity is non-chronological, that it exists both inside and outside of a progressive linear modernist temporality. The black can only enter this linear modern schema as a backward “subject”, lagging behind and having to catch up to the world by being “benevolently” civilised and developed. This temporal schema in relation to the black is a contradictory catch 22.

In Keeling’s (2008: 242) poignant words, “The human unfolds in time while the black is internal to time; the black haunts the human past, the present and future”. In relation to human [European] temporality, blackness ‘upsets’ the chronological linearity of time; this further indicates that black “ontology” (I use this term tentatively) is paradoxical in its simultaneous interiority and exteriority in relation to the project of settler modernity⁵⁷ especially its claims of a forward motion in linear time. Blackness then folds in and outside of itself, it is invaginated, in other words, non-chronological black subjectivity echoes what Mbembe (2002) describes as temporalities that are always simultaneous. Keeling (2008) claims that if the human is defined by linear progressive movement, then a non-chronological subjectivity cannot be called human. I argue that nostalgia’s inherent undermining of a linear progressive temporality has currency and utility in the way that “blackness” is enjoyed through the medium of the visual archive.

⁵⁷ Colonial settler modernity is defined by its purported progress and civilisation that it claims to bestow on the sub-human status of the native. In turn, paradoxically, this process of civilisation is impossible without gratuitous violence and dehumanisation.

CHAPTER THREE: ON NOSTALGIAS

Time, much like language or money, is a carrier of significance, a form through which we define the content of relations between the Self and the Other. Johannes Fabian (1983) *Time and the Other*

3. ON NOSTALGIAS

Nostalgias⁵⁸ that have their origins in modernity they are plural and like modernity, they cannot be reduced into a singular experience (De Jong & Valente-Quinn 2014:1). The experience of modernity for people of African descent has been tragically shaped by the loss and devastation caused by racial enslavement, coloniality and racial apartheid. The nostalgias that are foregrounded in this thesis are variably structured by these paradigms. Inevitably, the nostalgia that will be engaged and highlighted in this chapter will be the visual aspects of “imperialist nostalgia” as the anthropologist Renato Rosaldo (1989) defines it. Imperial nostalgia and colonial

⁵⁸ The type of nostalgia engaged by De Jong and Valente-Quinn (2014) lies on a spatial and infrastructural plane that is linked to ruins and ruination. Similar to Svetlana Boym's (2001) restorative nostalgia, this form of nostalgia begins as a state sanctioned, prospective vision in the manner that it seeks to build an “afro-future”, which predictably it ends up dilapidated, in ruins. De Jong and Valente Quinn (2014) investigate the ruins of the École normale William Ponty and more recently the University of the African Future, they argue how these dual projects articulated visions for African futures in Senegal and West Africa in general. The École normale William Ponty was established in 1903 as a teachers college, by the French colonial government. The college was named after French colonial administrator and governor of [French West Africa](#) (1908–1915). Many of the school's alumni later became part of the West African elite who would lead the struggle for independence from France. This illustrious alumni includes former heads of state and famous novelists such as Abdoulaye Wade, whose nostalgia is the focus of De Jong and Valente-Quinn, this alumni includes [Félix Houphouët-Boigny](#) and [Bernard Binlin Dadié](#) of Côte d'Ivoire, [Modibo Keita](#) of Mali and [Boubou Hama](#) of Niger amongst many. As a telling sign to its colonial origins, which ideologically clash with the grandiose vision of a Pan African future, the former president Senegal, Abdoulaye Wade's nostalgic recollections are based on his fond memories of reading French literature there “which we knew like the back of our hands. It wasn't like today; we knew Corneille Le Cid, Racine, Victor Hugo's Hernani” (Wade in De Jong and Valente-Quinn 2014:5). The elite status of Ponty is predicted on it being a French school, where students focussed on French literature and many of the Ponty graduates share this nostalgic pride, which is starkly in contrast with visions of an independent West Africa of which they would be later positioned to lead. What is alluded to in Wade's nostalgia, is a desire to be a well-versed French subject, a white ego ideal, rather than to be a free and sovereign African. This could be the reason why according to Seck (in De Jong & Valente Quinn: 6) this Pan-African unity “was sorely lacking” and as a result it could never come to fruition. Ponty signifies as a ruin, a site of an aborted African future. The University of the African Future (UAF) had a similar fate. Hatched by Abdoulaye Wade with the support of international donors including the former French president Jacques Chirac, they built the University of African Futures close to ruins of Ponty. In order to ensure world class prestige, quality and excellence of UAF courses would be taught by faculty from foreign institutions in the west, echoing the all-white teaching staff that used to teach at Ponty that elderly Senegalese interlocutors fondly remember serving, whom later in the article describe Ponty as a “paradise on earth”. De Jong and Valente-Quinn (2013) strain to argue or bring nuance to how recollections that sanitise racism are not a nostalgia for white domination, but a nostalgia for the Pan-Africanism signified by the West African presidents that were taught there. Both UAF and Ponty ended up as ruins, they fell short on their promise and ended up as dilapidated infrastructures that constitute palimpsests of imagined Afro-futures (De Jong and Valente-Quinn 2013:1). What becomes useful to my argument in this thesis is the circuitous and resilient way in which the ego ideals of coloniality and whiteness covertly pervade in African, postcolonial state-sanctioned visions of Pan-Africanism and in African Futures. With this in mind it becomes fitting that the former staff of Ponty describe it as “miniature Africa” as similar plots have unfolded elsewhere in the continent including in South Africa's post-1994 rainbowist ideology of the future.

nostalgia have a similar affective structures of loss and their meanings can be easily elided, however, there is a fine distinction made by Patricia M. E. Lorcin (2013:97) in her article “Imperial Nostalgia; Colonial Nostalgia Differences of Theory, Similarities of Practice” that is worth mentioning and quoting at length:

In the article that follows, which focuses on the narratives and practices of former imperial powers, I shall argue that there is a distinction to be made between imperial nostalgia and colonial nostalgia. The former I maintain, is associated with the *loss of empire*, that is to say the decline of national grandeur and the international power politics connected to economic and political hegemony. The latter by contrast is associated with the loss of sociocultural standing or to be more precise, *the colonial lifestyle*.
[Emphasis mine]

Both these nostalgias centre Western powers and more specifically, white collective subjectivities. The contexts used in Lorcin’s article are the Ivory Coast to discuss colonial nostalgia, and the Falkland Islands in the case of imperial nostalgia, where France and Britain respectively imposed hegemony. The discussion that follows here is less concerned about the nostalgias triggered by the loss of imperial property or the loss of colonial lifestyles as outlined by Lorcin (2013). The genre of the nostalgia centred in this chapter is the theoretical and affective formation of *imperialist nostalgia*. In his paper “Imperialist Nostalgia” Renato Rosaldo (1989) describes this type of nostalgia by its yearnings for ways of life and cultures that existed prior to the time of the encounter with colonialism. This form of nostalgia, like Lorcin’s (2013) “imperial nostalgia and colonial nostalgia” originates from white subjectivities. However, the loss that is felt by a white subject afflicted by “imperialist nostalgia” has more of a benevolent humanitarian white saviour-complex overtone. In the discussion that follows, contemporary photography becomes the privileged genre of imperialist nostalgia even though I note the elements of primitivism; a genre in modern art.

More importantly, in this chapter, I examine an imperialist nostalgia that operates in the selected archival artwork produced in the post-1994 post-apartheid context. Using the theoretical paradigm of imperialist nostalgia, a form of memory that yearns for a precolonial space and a subjectivity untainted by westernisation, as it is outlined by the anthropologist Renato Rosaldo, I will examine *Native Work*, an exhibition by the artist Andrew Putter (2013) who draws heavily from Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin's photographic archive. Furthermore, in the work of Ayana V. Jackson I will read the manner in which she aesthetically applies the method of erasure and sanitisation in the way in which she engages archival images of black suffering from the past. In this way, she unwittingly sanitises the visual archive rendering it consumable in a palatable way. Andrew Putter applies a similar method, but this is not to say that the original images (Cronin's photographs) that they draw from are unaffected by nostalgia's aesthetic paradigm of erasure; I am drawing attention to the significance of their work in the contemporary moment.

The overall vision of this chapter is to frame the aesthetics of imperialist nostalgia in modern art practice and the various ways that these aesthetics persist and are recycled in the selected artwork from contemporary, post 1994 South Africa artwork. This chapter pays attention to the complex and paradoxical relationship that the black subject/object has with temporality tropes in visual art practice.

In modern⁵⁹ art practice, tropes of temporality are primarily enunciated in psychoanalytical literature, which in turn underpins discursive and aesthetic paradigms such as 'primitivism' (Berger in Sweeney 2004). In essence, this chapter traces the intersections of nostalgia through the corporeal⁶⁰ through which it travels through black visuality, reflecting discursive chronotopes that

⁵⁹ I am aware that the definition of the 'modern' simply cannot be contained within the scope of a footnote. However, the focus of my argument here is not intended to dwell on circular arguments on what constitutes the modern and what does not. I am aware of the complexities of the argument pertaining to how European artists working under the designation of 'primitivism' appropriate non-Western visual idioms (derived from the colonies) in order to critique, renew and replenish the Western visual canon. I discuss aspects of this in this chapter. I primarily use the term 'modern' here in its own Eurocentric terms. Firstly, in order to refer to a chronological period between the 18th and 19th century in Europe and America when the ideology of progress was being aggrandised. Further, I use the term modern to refer to the style of visual expression that breaks radically with figurative art in order to reach the heights of abstraction.

⁶⁰ I use 'corporeal' to refer to the body, specifically, the black body.

structure blackness within the larger project of coloniality. The ontological question of blackness re-emerges in coloniality. In this thesis, coloniality is understood as an elaboration of captivity, a direct descendant of middle passage slavery. Therefore my approach takes seriously the idea of colonialism as an afterlife of slavery, colonialism as the second coming⁶¹, colonialism functioning like an affix, an addition to the baseline of slavery, as opposed to treating the two as mutually exclusive disaster events that unhuman black people.

What my argument is foregrounding is the concept of repetition and return that delineates the temporal logic of nostalgia. The notion of return is inspired by the idea of “perpetual returns” which I take from the title “Perpetual Returns: New World Slavery and the Matter of the Visual”, a paper by Huey Copeland and Krista Thompson (2011). Copeland and Thompson argue for a “reorientation of both art history and black studies in light of the ongoing specular effects of racial bondage” (Copeland and Thompson 2011:1). Through the artwork of Fred Wilson, they make a compelling argument about how the visual ought to be emphasised in the rewiring of slavery’s imaginary:

While the institution may have officially ended—in 1834 in the British West Indies, 1865 in the United States, and 1888 in Brazil—slavery, each contributor differently insists, is far from over, and freedom is not an end, but an ongoing and elusive process that can be brought into view through repeated attempts at its visualization. What emerges in these pages is the sense that the techniques and forms of seeing that constituted the enslaved still exert a tenacious grasp on black subjects in the present: slavery is never quite the past. Rather, it is constantly returned to through iconic forms that suggest the visual dynamics through which Africans came to be seen and were urged to see themselves as slaves, while also fostering new means of identification and resistance across and within the diaspora (Copeland and Thompson 2011:6).

⁶¹ See Andile Mngxitama’s (2014) “Not only our land but also our souls”. In this article Mngxitama challenges contemporary historical rhetoric in South Africa that myopically distances the African’s dispossession of land from the dispossession of the selfhood that is generated by the transatlantic slave trade. Mngxitama connects these two processes as part of a single trajectory, “When we lost our land, it was part of the trajectory of the irreparable loss inaugurated by slavery. Once the African was reduced to property next to other beasts in the auction block, claims to territory, to autonomy and bodily integrity became silly luxuries not available to us. Often, we forget that land dispossession through colonialism is the second coming – the first being the dispossession of the selfhood of Blacks through the long nights of transatlantic horrors untold.” Andile Mngxitama (2014).

The perpetual return by way of the visual form is an entry point for a much-needed debate about the extent to which imagery may function to recapitulate particular histories to elicit repetitions; Derek Hook (2014:44) alludes to this in his discussion on “uncanny historical (dis)continuity”. If one carries on from this note, then perhaps nostalgia emanates from an unconscious compulsion “to repeat, to double a prior act”, to carry history into the present.

The term nostalgia first appears in the medical dissertation *Dissertatio Medica de Nostalgia Oder Heimwehe*⁶², written during the enlightenment period, in Europe by a Swiss doctor, Johannes Hofer in 1688. Nostalgia was initially diagnosed as an ailment that afflicts displaced peoples; according to Boym (2001:3), the first people to be officially diagnosed constituted “freedom loving students from the Republic of Berne studying in Basel, domestic help and servants working in France and Germany and Swiss soldiers fighting abroad”. Hofer noted that nostalgia was symptomised by “erroneous representations” that caused the victims to lose touch with the present; the obsessive longing of “a return” (by the afflicted) to their native land drove nostalgia, according to Hofer. In the light of the previous discussion, I put an emphasis on the notion of “return”. The patients of nostalgia readily conflated the past and present, and real and imaginary events, and claimed to possess the ability to hear and see ghosts. With his dissertation, Hofer aimed to establish a new field in medical science, along with the newly identified phenomenon of homesickness.

His ambition was to discipline nostalgia by way of grounding it in the field of medicine – this proved to be futile, as nostalgia later travelled into psychological discourse and memory studies – but this was not without contestation and dissent (Davis 1977:4). As if to echo the displacement that triggers its affect across the humanities and the sciences spectrum, nostalgia does not stay in any one scholarly field for a prolonged period, or at least there seems to be no consensus about its place in the different branches of knowledge. The fact that nostalgia as a concept can be implemented beyond the discursive boundaries of a particular discipline is a

⁶² Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia or Homesickness (Nakamura 2016:2)

testament to its relevance and dynamism as a concept. Svetlana Boym (2001:17) makes a point about this:

The study of nostalgia does not belong to any specific discipline: it frustrates psychologists, sociologists, literary theorists, philosophers, and even computer scientists who thought they had gotten away from it all—until they took refuge in their homepage and cyber pastoral vocabulary of the global village.

The question of nostalgia in knowledge production is further discussed by C. D. Chrostowska (2016) in the paper “Critical Longing: On Nostalgia’s Role in Critique”. Chrostowska proceeds from nostalgia’s origins in medical science to attempt to recuperate the political nuances of nostalgia. She fleshes out the various ways that nostalgia can be used as an instrument of critique, particularly social critique. The overriding question that emerges from this premise is whether nostalgia can be used a tool to comment on society. This enquiry explores the extent to which nostalgia can have a cognitive function in critical theory versus its pervasive dismissal as a mere affect. One of the definitive features of nostalgia is its natural affinity to affect through its unabated sentimentality and it is longing for an idealised past and utopian future. Chrostowska (2016:2) insists that nostalgia is an affective-cognitive impulse that has a relationship with how we reflect on “history, culture and the future of society”.

Nostalgia has a critical underpinning that is often neglected and dismissed; this under-acknowledged criticality of nostalgia is fairly noticeable within a number of modern discursive formations. They are “firstly German aesthetics, Romanticism and Idealism; second, utopianism and critiques of society/culture in the wake of the French Revolution and industrialisation (particularly utopian social theory and experiments in intentional socialist communities) ...” (2016:3). Therefore, what is foregrounded is the use of affect not just as a mode of reflection but also the critical insights that can be gained from the various ways it shapes and organises the various canons in art and visual culture. Chief amongst this list of affective modes is the critical

discourse of “primitivism” and its affinities to “the golden age, sentimentalism, the sublime, pessimism, or antiquarianism” (2016:4). My argument in this chapter takes seriously the framework of nostalgia that structures primitivism and the aesthetics that give it visual expression in the selected images from modern and contemporary visual culture. What is seen as the golden age of western modernity, the enlightenment period is made possible by its underbelly, the enslavement of Africans and the colonial world system that it births, the world we inherit. The valorisation and sublimation of the savage through *primitivism* is a necessary nostalgic sentimentalism that acts as a sanitizing alibi, covering up the destruction of the native and their “uncivilised” ways of life. Through the nostalgia⁶³ and sublimation of the pre-modern, the primitive and the uncivilised, a distance is created from the colonial violence and the death that brings this form of life to a halt. In a narcissistic turn, it is violence that one seeks to distance and cleanse oneself from that begets imperialist nostalgia; the subject afflicted with this type of affect regards oneself as the benevolent friend and saviour of the endangered. Conversely, imperialist nostalgia’s sentimentalism for what seems to be a different past “when things where better”, simultaneously exposes an unwitting avowal and admission of the misdeed.

⁶³ Furthermore, where the “past” in question is racial domination, I am inclined to believe that all forms of nostalgic recollection are implicated in a symbolic violence in the form of erasure.

3.1 IMPERIALIST NOSTALGIA: MODERN TEMPORALITY AND NARRATIVES OF PROGRESS

The old man died beneath the wheels of the twentieth century.
There was nothing left but stains, bloodstains and fragments of
flesh ... And the same thing is happening to my generation
(Marechera 1979:45).

Safa saphela isizwe, ngenxa ka janstshi

Busi Mhlongo (1994)

In her song Janstshi, Busi Mhlongo sings this line in isiZulu that translates to; *the people have perished because of railway lines*. In this instance, I am reading the railways lines as a symbol representing the expansion of western modernity in Africa. Similarly, Dambudzo Marechera poetically captures what Cornel West (1991:51) describes as the “ignoble paradox of modernity”⁶⁴. In *House of Hunger* (1979), the Zimbabwean novelist Dambudzo Marechera uses the train as a metaphor for settler modernity as it moves through southern Africa leaving a trail of death and mangled flesh on its tracks. Busi Mhlongo, a popular South African maskandi musician utters similar sentiments in her song “Jantshi” which loosely translates to train rails in English. In the song, Busi Mhlongo laments the death that follows the construction of the railway, the railway here functions as well established metaphor for colonial development. From this perspective, the locomotive of modern progress and civilisation runs on the fuel of violence and destruction as its source of energy, and it does not pass once: the train *returns* and the prior act is *doubled*. The language of modernity typically obscures this, if it does not disavow it completely; at its quintessential, this is propagated by the term, ‘the white man’s burden’⁶⁵. From this perspective,

⁶⁴ I borrow the term, directly from Cornel West (1999:51). In the chapter “The Ignoble Paradox of Modernity”, West addresses the often overlooked destructive aspects of modernity, paying particular attention to the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade and New World slavery, which is the springboard of modernity.

⁶⁵ “The White Man’s Burden” is the title of a poem written by the British novelist and poet Rudyard Kipling in 1899.

the civilising mission is seen as benevolence and charitableness provided or performed by the white (WO) man. White subjects are burdened with the duty of bringing the savage into the light of civilisation. The coeval coupling of nostalgia with modernity is deep rooted. Nostalgia in this instance serves the modern ideologists, who pat themselves on the back for bringing blacks up to speed. Bernard Magubane (2007:213) touches on this aspect, when he remarks that the organising logic to this idea is based on the idea that the reason black people remain in a state of wretchedness is because of their ingratitude for slavery and colonialism:

Ideologists serving the exploitative systems always have insisted that the extant order was not only sensible and proper but also inevitable hence slavery reflected the nature of slaves; its existence therefore was not only logical but beneficial...Colonialism existed because of the nature of those colonised; hence again it was both logical and philanthropic...Racist segregation exists because of the nature of those segregated and again it is both logical and humane (Aptheker in Magubane 2007:217)

Boym (2001), Naqvi (2007), Bonnet (2010), Bracke (2012) and Chrostowska (2016) position nostalgia as a distinctly modern phenomenon. Boym (2001) argues that nostalgia is a disease of the modern age, precisely because it responds to a new understanding of modern time and space. The temporal logic of modernity⁶⁶ is founded on a linear, forward motion of an unrepeatable and irreversible time, whereas nostalgia seeks to disturb this linearity. The dawn of ‘imperialist nostalgia’ breaks alongside the self-righteous, humanitarian call to morally uplift and civilise the ‘newly caught’ natives out of their ‘natural’ state of savagery. How does one reconcile these two seemingly disparate narratives – the one of preservation and the other of alteration?

⁶⁶ Baudelaire coined the noun “modernity”. Derived from Latin *modo* (recently, just now) it comes into usage in the Christian middle ages; initially it meant the ‘present’ and ‘contemporary’, and there was nothing radical about it. It is crucial to distinguish modernity as a critical project from modernisation as a social practice and a state policy, which usually refers to industrialisation and technological progress. Modernity and modernisms are responses to the condition of modernisation. This modernity is contradictory, critical, ambivalent and reflective on the nature of time; it combines a fascination for the present with a longing for another time. The late nineteenth century and early twentieth century was the last instance of a dialogue between artists, scientists, philosophers and critics in the attempt to develop a comprehensive understanding of the modern condition, a new conception of time (Boym 2001:22). Furthermore, I am aware of internal contradictions that arise in thinking about black subjectivity as non-chronological and as temporally other. These contradictions are unresolvable as the black subject through the modern analysis is treated as a problem to the construct of modern time and its forward linear motion of progress. One of the tenets of Afrofuturism that I discuss in chapter six is to undermine this chronotope of black backwardness in relation to modern progress and technology

My sense is to turn to “Imperialist Nostalgia” an article written by the anthropologist Renato Rosaldo. In the text, Rosaldo (1989) states that imperialist nostalgia is defined by a yearning for ways of life and cultures that existed before or at the time of the encounter with colonialism; what is particularly intriguing, is that this strain of nostalgia affects the “agents of colonialism”, the bearers of change:

Curiously enough, agents of colonialism—officials, constabulary officers, missionaries and other figures from whom anthropologists ritually dissociate themselves—often display nostalgia for the colonized culture as it were “traditionally” (that is, when they first encountered it). The peculiarity of the yearning, of course, is that agents of colonialism long for the very forms of life they intentionally altered or destroyed (Rosaldo 1989:107–108).

What becomes curious here is that the very form of life and existence that is considered savage by colonial forces is the locus of nostalgic longing; at the centre of this ostensible paradox, lies the question of violence. In the apt words of Rosaldo (1989:108):

Imperialist nostalgia thus revolves around a paradox: a person kills somebody and then mourns his or her victim. In a more attenuated form, someone deliberately alters a form of life and then regrets that things have not remained as they were prior to his or her intervention.

Imperialism at its softest altered indigenous ways of life and, at its most severe; it dragged native life to a screeching halt through complete destruction. This annihilation paradoxically engenders a romantic obsession with the idea of the ‘vanishing primitive’. In this aspect, it is better to understand imperialist nostalgia as a mechanism of invoking one’s innocence while simultaneously “talking about what one has destroyed” evoking what Rosaldo, (1989:108) identifies as an air of humanitarian imperialism. The heart of my argument lies here; it extends closely from Rosaldo’s, with the support of Sarah Brackes’s (2012) text *Nostalgia’s Violence*. My argument aims to elaborate the various ways that imperialist nostalgia is an affective paradigm that

erases and inflicts systemic violence, in both real and representational forms. Nostalgia emerges from the violence undergirding the formation of modernity.

Rosaldo's (1989) ruminations on imperialist nostalgia pointedly expose the various ways that some aspects of the discipline of anthropology plays a role in epistemicide. The author and ethnographer, Rosaldo (1989) emboldens this claim by placing this form of anthropology squarely alongside evangelical Christian missionaries and colonial constabulary officers, asserting that they occupy overlapping ideological spaces in their reproduction of imperialist nostalgia (Rosaldo 1989:111). The task of my argument is to shed some light on the role of modern art, primarily the aesthetic category of primitivism, within this overlapping grid. In this way, I lay the discursive ground from where the artwork of Andrew Putter (2013) and Ayana V. Jackson can be contextualised and critically discussed.

According to Magubane (2007:26) in his book, *Race and the Construction of the Dispensable Other*, ethnography functions as the epistemological handmaiden of Western imperialism, endowing conquest and imperialism with intellectual legitimacy (Magubane 2007:26). Later in this chapter, I examine the work of the American born, South Africa based, African-American artist, Ayana V. Jackson in order to capture the overlapping ideological aesthetics of imperialist nostalgia and primitivism, and the various ways that they continue to overlap and manifest in contemporary art.

One cannot overstate the process of epistemicide and how it is achieved through the colonial imposition of modern temporality, where the 'native' is othered through temporal distancing. This aspect is important, as it paves the way to how we arrive at the temporal tropes that naturalise the black body as phobogenic. The conceptual bedrock of Johannes Fabian's (1983, 2002) famous text *Time and the other* is based on a critique of the ethnography, which he indicates functions like an epistemological factory producing alterity in mass. As stated by Clifford (1986:23), "Ethnography in the service of anthropology once looked out at clearly defined others

as primitive, or tribal, or pre-Western or non-historical”. By rendering the others as temporally different, this type of anthropology relegated its ‘other’ into a static temporal zone of the past. Natives, also known as primitives, are written as fixed and unchanging objects; echoing the stability of stereotypes, they are treated as stable, unmoving entities, rendering them accessible and available for European study and scrutiny.

As suggested by Rosaldo (1989) the time of the ethnographer, like that of the evangelical missionary and the constabulary officer, is differentiated as linear moving and progressive. This is while, in sharp contrast to the Western self⁶⁷, the native ‘other’ is confined to a stagnation, fixed into a sterile ‘non-historical past’. The differentiation is stark, like night and day, the polarities delineating progressive, linear time against an unmoving static existence, constituting what Fabian calls anthropology’s denial of coevolves:

As long as anthropology presents its object primarily as seen, as long as ethnographic knowledge is conceived primarily as observation and/or representation (in terms of models, symbols systems, and so forth) it is likely to persist denying coevalness to its other (Fabian 1983:151-152).

The denial of temporal co-existence between the Western self and its non-Western other justifies dispossession and dehumanisation. Epistemological violence lies in the fact that these non-Western subjects—objects and their ways of life are not measured by their own standards; in fact, a system of measurement that they have not contributed to is violently imposed upon them (Lushaba 2015). The ‘other’s’ diminished agency is further reflected in the asymmetrical terms of engagement, as indirectly critiqued by Johannes Fabian in *Time and the other* (2006). Fabian interrogates how “speaking for others” is embedded in the disciplinary practices of anthropology and generally in the scope of the humanities. To echo Biko, “The interests of blacks are mediated

⁶⁷ In a narcissistic self-affirming way, the Western white self, through violence creates and maintains the category of the other in order to know and validate itself.

by white mouths and eyes” (Biko in Hook 2014), creating the conditions for subjects to speak for themselves cannot happen, as it would disrupt the continuum.

3.3 PRIMITIVISM AND ALTERITY

During the early twentieth century, alterity discourse takes on major significance; this is apparent in the manner in which artefacts of ethnography are ascribed value, when they land in the hands of European artists at the turn of the century. Primitivism and primitive art emerges as a vehicle that shuttles ethnographic alterity into the realm of modern art: to be specific the modern avant-garde. To rejuvenate modern art, visits to ethnographic museums were a common ritual for European artists who, acting like surrogate anthropologists, would spend time scrutinising artefacts from imperialistic plunder. Now we enter the realm of cultural colonialism as characterised by Susan Hiller (1993) in *The Myth of Primitivism*. Europe’s aesthetic horizons expanded during the period of imperial-colonial plunder, through the importation of visual ideas derived from Africa and the Pacific. Any discussion pertaining to cultural colonialism and the role of art history within this matrix needs to take cognisance of the fact that the discipline of art history comes from the tradition of self-enclosure; it is a discipline that has historically adopted an apolitical naiveté and racial innocence, a system that, as Kenneth Coutts-Smith (1993:15) critiques:

The discipline of art history has never, until now (excepting in the work of isolated individuals regarded, institutionally, as tangential), been required to submit itself to the historical rigours of social and political fact, but has been nourished in the main on poetic insight and metaphysical speculation.

The insular “self-enclosure” that Coutts-Smith refers to evokes Lewis Gordon’s argument in his article, *Disciplinary Decadence and the Decolonisation of Knowledge* (2014); here he cautions against the fetishisation of a single method. Being dogmatic about homogeneous methods of enquiry that are typically confined to the canon of the given discipline, leads to a myopic understanding of the complex realities where our objects of enquiry emerge. With this said, the

canon of art history, in its Eurocentric terms, is simply unfit to tackle the aesthetic status of African-derived objects and the subjectivities that create them. It is vital to reach out to a diversity of discursive models in order to engage.

In engaging questions of art and visual production in the context of colonality and the role of the art establishment, artistic terms simply do not suffice, unless one wants to circumvent the question of race. The principal issues revolve around the politics of the exhibitions rather than solely with the individual work in itself in formalist terms, although this is not to say that formalism is not important (Chambers 1999:44). The politics of the space, the anticipated audience of the space, how the objects come to be signified as primitive and as art, or better yet, oxymoronicallly labelled as ‘primitive art’, needs careful and deep interrogation. In the following section, I unpack the underpinnings of modernity in its culturally colonial aspects, echoing the critical perspective that Dussel (1996) describes it as the underside of modernity⁶⁸ and Bernard Magubane (2007) who outlines it in *Race and the Construction of the Dispensable Other*.

Primitivism is fabricated with a double-edged, bifurcated function; on one hand, it has a positive value, it is a metacritique of modernity; by valorising a pastoral pre-industrial life, it primarily seeks to undermine modernity’s narrative of linearity and progress. On the other hand, it is negative and pervasive, it speaks about alterity and ‘the other’, in other words Europe’s racist relationship with its colonised subjects. I say racist, in so far as it evokes social Darwinism, a frame of reasoning that places people of African descent at the very bottom of the evolutionary ladder; as Colin Rhodes states, “In these cases, so-called primitive (and/or savage) ‘races’ were highlighted as examples of rudimentary types, as evidence of Europe’s past” (Rhodes 1997:14). Primitivism and primitive art are interrelated categories that are not mutually exclusive from one another.

⁶⁸ Further, this seamy side of modernity is captured by Bernard Magubane (2007) in his book, *Race and the Construction of the Dispensable Other*. Magubane (2007:230) describes how modernity flourished during the era of the slave trade and empire. European civilisation progressed, while the plight of those who it enslaved and colonised worsened.

Many scholars have written comprehensively on the subject of primitivism and primitive art across anthropology and art history; it is a wide category, which has taken various forms from one text to the next. However, it is worth noting that primitive art began traditionally as a domain of anthropology (Myers 2006:268). In *Primitivism and Modern Art*, Robert Goldwater (1986:17) stresses a distinction between the “primitivism” of modern art and the “primitivism” of anthropology.

There has been some misunderstanding—especially among anthropologists—that in this discussion the “primitivism” of modern art has been equated with “primitive” art. It is of course widely accepted today that the art of the so-called primitive people is not in itself “primitive,” i.e. neither technically crude nor aesthetically unsubtle. Quite apart from this, my purpose has not been to establish a parallel, but rather the opposite.

Whilst I am in agreement with Goldwater in terms of differentiating the methodological approaches in relation to the phenomena of primitivism, I do think that his noted emphasis of this technical disjuncture is not useful or productive in understanding primitivism as a discursive formation. In white supremacist hetero-normative institutional settings, the elevation and advancement of objects made by colonial subjects, either directly through cultural appropriation or indirectly by borrowing their visual styles, does not in essence change the structurally debased status of the producers of that aesthetic. Instead, it merely circumvents very important questions pertaining to the redistribution of power, whilst maintaining the status quo.

I believe it is vital to interrogate how the fabrication of the ‘primitive’ functions within various disciplines in the humanities in order to identify some of the ways that knowledge production has been in the service of colonialism and the hegemony of Eurocentrism and white supremacy. In essence, the category of the primitive is a relational, dialogical and comparative one that is inextricably linked to the modern. Primitivism is a function on the modern (Myers 2006,

Foster 1993 and McEvilly 1992). It is fundamentally a Eurocentric concept that speaks to white people's needs. As succinctly articulated by Sontag (1970:185):

Modern thought is pledged to a kind of applied Hegelianism:
seeking its Self in the Other. Europe seeks its self in the exotic
... The 'other' is experienced as a harsh purification of self.

Where Sontag uses "harsh," I prefer violent. This process is not an abstract one as suggested in "modern thought": the Hegelianism is "applied" by force; it is realised violently and by death, through institutional apparatuses and systemic forces. Put differently, even though we know and accept that this discourse that the myth of primitivism is not based on empirical evidence in its construction, this does not diminish the fact that people's lives were and continue to be destroyed in the systemic perpetuation this ideology. This leads us back to the question of power and about who speaks. The question of an asymmetrical exercise of power through epistemicide lays the bedrock of the self-other primitivist schema. The violent act of negation and erasure is characterised by Marianna Torgovenick as follows (1990:09):

The needs of the present determine the value and nature of the primitive. The primitive does what we ask it to do. Voiceless, it lets us speak for it. It is our ventriloquist's dummy or so we like to think ... The real secret of the primitive in this century has been the same secret as always: the primitive can be – has been, will be whatever Euro-Americans want it to be. It tells us what we want it to tell us.

The glaringly uneven relations of power are overwhelming the primitive has no "ontological resistance" because the primitive does not exist: I echo Fanon here, in "The Fact of Blackness" (1952, 2008:83); where he states, "the black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man". For elaboration, in modern art I turn to Hal Foster's 1993 text "'Primitive' Scenes". Foster, mirroring Fanon in "The Fact of Blackness" opens his paper with the line "'Dirty Nigger!' Or simply, 'Look, a Negro!'", the infamous primal scene. My argument is partly indebted to Hal Foster's paper, as far as Foster uses the notion of the primal scene as a productive moment,

as a way of identifying how primitivist fantasies of alterity are peddled in art practice. In “‘Primitive’ Scenes”, Foster looks into the instances where primitivism is heartily embraced and rearticulated with a positive value in the work of Paul Gauguin, Ludwig Kirchner and Pablo Picasso.

As I previously mentioned, the rearticulation of colonised and enslaved subjects and their objects through a positive and an affirmative lens does not necessarily mean that the conditions of the subjection are collapsed. What is of value, to my thinking, is that Foster brings psychoanalysis into the conversation, as led by Frantz Fanon, whose *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) doubles as a canonical postcolonial text and as foundational in racial psychoanalytical theory. Fanon explicitly unravels how psychoanalysis cannot be disimbricated from colonialism and imperialism. On the same score, Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, was known to venture into anthropology, according to David Macey (2003:15). Freud viewed anthropology as an integral part of his new discipline. He frequently made commentary on primitive societies and primitive religions. “The Mental Life of Savages and Neurotics”, a subtitle in *Totem and Taboo* (1913), being a case in point. Psychoanalytical theory under the hand of Freud correlates the different stages of the human psyche with the evolutionary stages of ‘human’ civilisations.

In the same way, racial others are associated with instinctual impulses: psychoanalytical theory places “tribal people” with the infantile stages of human development (Foster 1993). Even the terminology of psychoanalysis reproduces and reflects the colonial and anti-Semitic assumptions flourishing in Europe at the time the discipline of psychoanalysis emerged (Frosh 2013). In service of Eurocentrism and imperialism, Freud normalises and naturalises Western civilisation as equivalent to the adult stages of the human psyche; take for instance his opening paragraph in *Totem and Taboo*:

There are men still living, who as we believe, stand very near to primitive man, far nearer than we do, whom we therefore regard as their direct heirs and representatives. Such is our view of those we describe as savages and half-savages; and

their mental life is a well-preserved picture of an early stage of our own development (Freud 1913:1).

Freud uses the pronoun “our” to temporally distance “the other” whilst bringing together occidental whiteness as a whole, across its internal divisions, across the gender and class spectrum. The bonds of whiteness are strengthened by antiblackness, notwithstanding the fact that Europe has its own primitives who are also associated with instinctual impulses; this group is mainly composed of the proletariat, although not exclusively. Jews, children and women are also constituted as primitive in their moral and civilisational capacity (Foster 1993:3). From this depiction, it becomes apparent that the normative and central position, from which the authentic voice of Europe is heard, is from the position of the white bourgeois male. Freud was also abundantly clear about how savages and children occupy the lowest evolutionary rung and share similar attributes in their thought patterns:

It seems to me quite possible that the same may be true about the psychology of those races that have remained at an animistic level, as is true of the mental life of children which we adults, no longer understand and whose fullness and delicacy of feeling we have therefore so greatly underestimated (Freud 1913:99).

Consider the double function of the phrase the “Dark Continent”: first as a myth⁶⁹ violently used to epistemologically erase and materially destroy Africa’s pre-colonial histories and civilisations that existed prior to imperial contact (Bratlinger 1985:166) and second as an epithet, used by Freud to refer to female sexuality, apparently drawing on the travelogues of the colonial explorer Henry Morton Stanley (Khanna 2003). In order to satiate the needs of a male European bourgeois elite and by extension their junior partners (white women, children and the proletariat), in one fell swoop, Africans are infantilised and androgenised, forming the material baseline for the antiblack stereotypes embedded in colonial visual culture. Primitivism intellectually emboldens the imperial enterprise that unfolded in Africa. If one follows Ranjana Khanna’s (2003) argument

⁶⁹ This myth gained traction in Victorian England after slavery was abolished in 1833 and during the imperial scramble for Africa in 1884.

in her book *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism*, where she argues that psychoanalysis is a colonial discipline, and then the marriage of psychoanalysis and anthropology, as ordained by imperial-colonialism, gives birth to a pervasive primitivist discursive formation that will go on to shape the standards and contours of the modern art establishment.

3.3 PRIMITIVE ART AND MODERN ART

Although the primitive and the modern are fabricated as different, they are two sides of the same coin. They are congruent, inseparable and deeply connected at the roots. Thus, in the fitting words of Fred Myers (2006:268), “The primitive is a dialogical category, often explicitly a function of the modern”. The interrelatedness of these two categories demands a clear distinction between what is referred to by the use of the terms primitive art and modern art. Art historians and anthropologists alike, such as Colin Rhodes, Marianne Torgovnick, Thomas McEvelley, Robert Goldwater and Hal Foster, generally agree, with slight variations in their arguments, that “primitive art”, sometimes referred to as “tribal art”, “non-Western art” or “aboriginal art”, consists of objects, usually sculptures and masks, produced mainly by the indigenous populations of Africa, Oceania and Australia.

The point of contestation resides in the fact that these objects, from their points of origin, were not created to be consumed and circulated as ‘art’ in the Western sense of the concept. Although anthropologists were the first to acknowledge and qualify them as objects of art, they were largely exhibited in ethnographic and natural history museums, not in fine art museum (Myers 2006:269). This meant that, in the process of recontextualisation, these objects were re-signified as art. The transformation of these objects, with the subsequent drainage of their original meanings, to being endowed and ‘sublimated’ as objects of art, radically shifted the contours of what the definition of art is altogether. The recontextualisation of these objects and their transformation into art objects speaks directly to a form of epistemicide. The effacing and obscuring of their native histories and functions in Western art museums and galleries meant that

they were displayed as aesthetic examples of alterity. They were used as crude representations of the differences between the savage races and their modern progressive counterparts. They catalysed an existential crisis for the art establishment and its standards of value.

African objects – sculptures and masks – made a profound impact on the aesthetic trajectory of European modernism in art practice (Tate 2003:9). Perceived as carriers of alterity and otherness, African artefacts became an interface between the European self and the temporally distant other. This encounter is central to the potency of primitivism. In modern art, the temporal configuration of primitivism becomes the measure by which the progress of modernity is critiqued and subverted:

The desire to vicariously rebel against European culture from within an imaginary black body took on a philosophical dimension in this century as the conceit inspired the cosmopolitan inventors of cubism and Dadaism to defy European conventions in the name of going native (Tate 2003:9).

The “cosmopolitan inventors” Greg Tate refers to are a successive movement of artists, affected by both bourgeois and bohemian sensibilities. Chief amongst them are the likes of Pablo Picasso (cubism), Ludwig Kirchner (German expressionism), Henri Matisse (Fauvism) and Paul Gauguin (Neo-impressionism), who through various strategies of appropriation configured the visuality of alterity aesthetics via the medium of paint. Through their practice, a sublimation of alterity was realised. The ambivalence that undergirds the aesthetics of primitivism is a critical factor that typifies Europe’s relationship of attraction and repulsion to Africa and its people and objects. In my argument, I take seriously the unique and productive tension that comes with speaking about the interchangeable status of African objects and African bodies on the conveyor belt of European modern art. In the following discussion, I wish to raise and centre a number of themes and phenomena that I argue are the nodal points in the aesthetic and discursive formation of primitivism. Many artists, specifically the ones that I have listed earlier, sought to expose themselves as much as possible to the primitive (non-Western) and the objects sourced from Africa

(Rhodes 1997:91). Ethnographic museums, world fairs, the circus and human zoos were the key points for satiating one's primitivist curiosities in the visual domain. In his text *Primitivism and Modern Art*, Colin Rhodes (1997) gives us a glimpse into a letter written by Ludwig Kirchner to his colleague Erick Heckel (ibid.):

The famous Benin bronzes are still on show, as well as some things from Pueblos of Mexico and some African sculptures ... a circus is here again, and Samoans and Africans are coming to the zoo this summer.

Rhodes aptly notes the easy conflation of the museum, the circus and the zoo, alluding to the pervasive reach of primitivism: "The untroubled switch from museum to circus, from high culture to popular culture should be seen as inevitable in the history of Primitivism" (1997:92). All of the noted institutions share the same symbolic and ideological sphere. They represent a summation of dehumanising stratagems in visual culture. The circus, the ethnological museum and the human zoo (ethnological expositions) assemble the racial spectacle and the racial gaze. I would go as far as to say that the museum–circus–zoo triad represents the rudimentary beginnings of technologies that serve the reproduction of colonial epistemology and racial pleasure in the form of sadomasochistic enjoyment. Think of the tragic voyage of Sarah Baartman from South Africa to Ireland, England and France; her life is often simplified to the soul-shattering events that unfolded against her in Europe, nevertheless, the same institutional triad exploits her body in spectacular ways.

She is displayed at the Piccadilly Circus, then passed on to an animal trainer⁷⁰ (at some point she was exhibited with a collar around her neck) and, upon her death, her genitalia and bones were housed and displayed at a museum of natural history for another 150 years (Sharpley-Whiting 1999:18). At the representational scale of visual art practice, her anatomy inspired what is arguably

⁷⁰ Reaux is the name of the French animal trainer that exhibited Sarah Baartman in Paris. Parisians could view Baartman for admission price of three francs, Reaux was also exhibiting a five-year-old male rhinoceros for the same price (Sharpley-Whiting 1999:19)

a watershed moment in the medium of expressionist art. Figure 3, *Les curieux en extase ou les cordons de souliers*, is one of many illustrations of her, where she is gawked at like a specimen. The primitivist-prostitute trope is moulded from the anatomical form of Sarah Baartman; her figure is centred as an object of desire and identification (Foster 1993:13). Is this a gesture of sublimation perhaps? A case in point is Matisse's *Blue Nude*, Memories of Biskra (Figure 3.1) painted in 1907; what is striking about this figure is her midsection – her hips are excessively rotated in order to intensify the protrusion of her posterior.

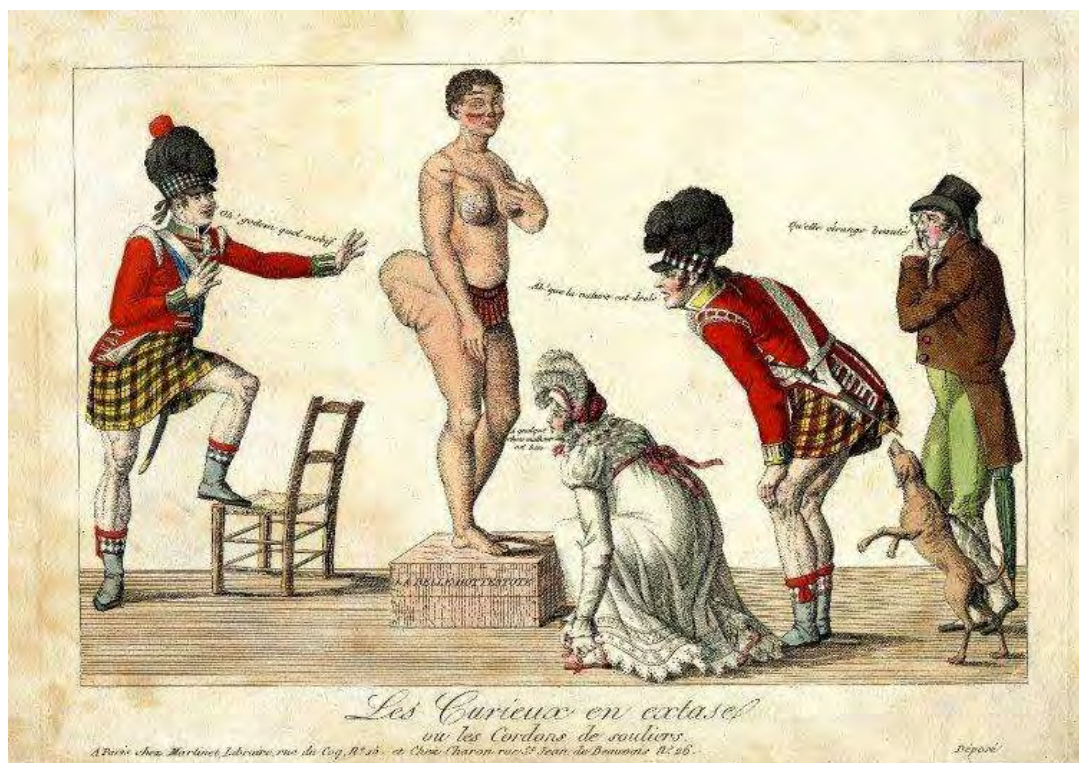


Figure 3. *Les curieux en extase ou les cordons de souliers*, 1814



Figure 3.1. Matisse, H. *The Blue Nude (Souvenir of Biskra)*, 1907

As if to rival Matisse, Kirchner paints his version of a prostitute-cum-primitive titled *The girl under a Japanese umbrella*, (Figure 3.2) rendered with a radiating palette of yellows and reds; her “primitivist contrapposto is even more extreme” (Foster 1993:14).

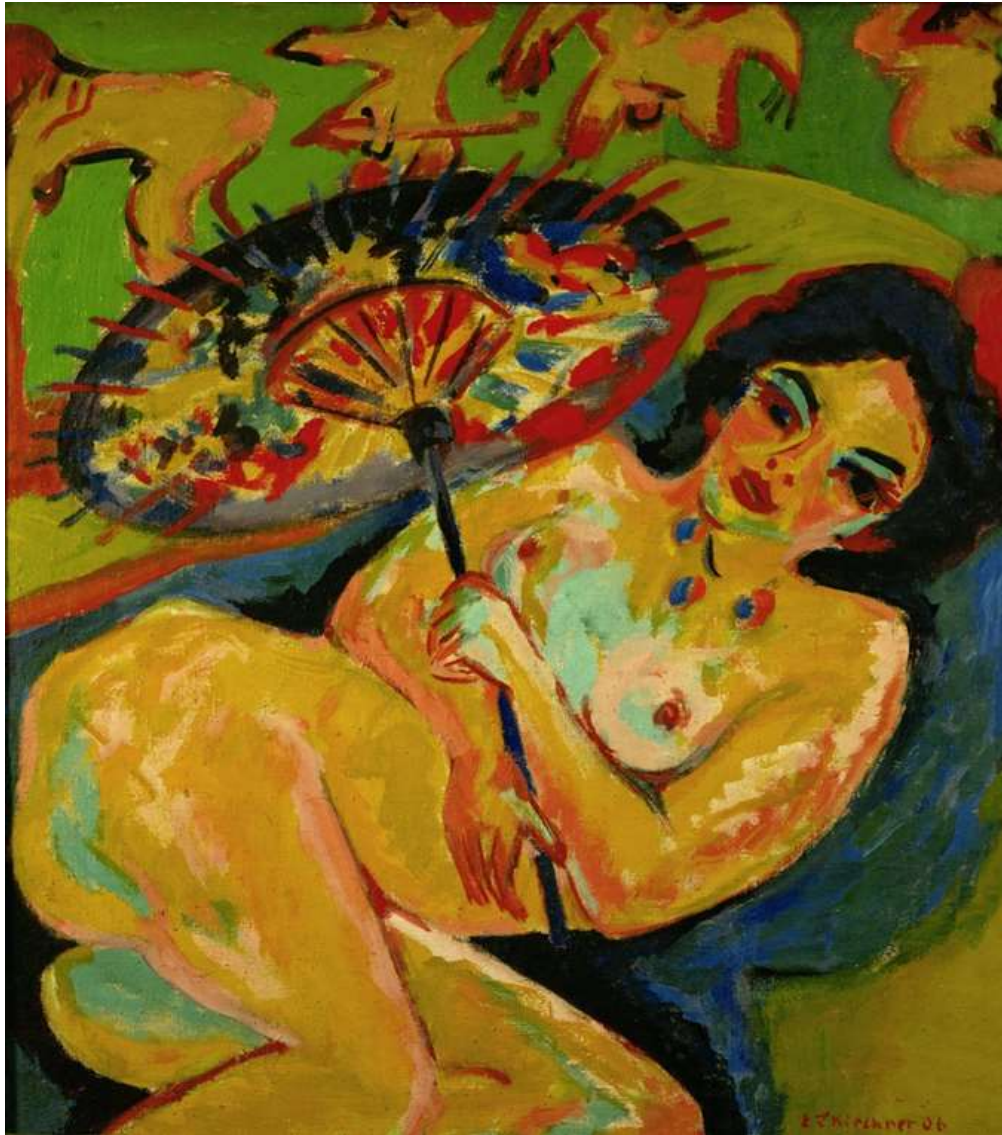


Figure 3.2. Kirchner, L. *Mädchen unter Japanschirm* (Girl under a Japanese Umbrella), 1909

On scrutiny, buried under the heavy, raw and graphic style of expressionist painting lies an antiblack female stereotype. It brings to mind what Joy James (2002:127) calls the “appeal of exotica tinged with racial savagery and perversity”. This brand of primitivist display⁷¹, I argue, is

⁷¹ Primitivism as a form of nostalgia can be traced back to ancient Rome however, in the South African modern context, artworks created by South African white artists such as Irma Stern and Cecil Skotnes during the first half of the twentieth century can be argued to reflect a local form of this modern primitivist perspective (Leibhammer 2011:59). Irma Stern is arguably the most important stand out figure in her portrayal of the “primitive”. Stern fully embraced the aesthetics of German Expressionism, in search of inspiration she travels to the Belgian Congo in 1942 “the heart of Africa” and to Zanzibar in 1939, from where she paints in her portraits that celebrates the stereotype of the “noble savage”. According to Leibhammer (in Carmen 2011:59) her portraits “push and pull between the racial type and the individual”. Modern South African artists such as Alexis Preller, Dorothy Kay, Walter Batiss and Maggie Laubser to name a few draw whose works romanticize “those primitive people still untouched by civilization”, “wild tribes”, and their “strange, sacred and grotesque” (Dubow in Van Robbroeck 1974:16). As I briefly mention in the first chapter that the work of many of the aforementioned artists was curated in the exhibition *All Your Faves Are Problematic* curated by Khwezi Gule that took place at the Johannesburg art gallery Gule in February

the archetype that catalyses the infernal cycle of repetitions and simulations reproduced in the twenty-first century as if to restage the primal scene. I revisit and consolidate this point in my discussion of contemporary art in post-apartheid South Africa.

3.4 SHADES OF IMPERIALIST NOSTALGIA IN POST-APARTHEID CONTEMPORARY ART PRACTICE

What is the use of trying to civilise us, if you want to photograph us in our skins, which we have already thrown away. (Godby 2010)

A nameless “native” utters the statement above in an article written by the art historian, Michael Godby (2010), titled “Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin’s Photography for *The Bantu Tribes of South Africa*’ (1928-1954): The Construction of an Ambiguous Idyll”. In this text, Godby unravels the ethnographic work of the Irish photographer A. M. Duggan-Cronin, as indicated by the title. It is suggested in Godby’s text that the “native” is responding to the traveller photographer, Duggan-Cronin, as he was known to request his potential sitters at a moment’s notice to switch their Western clothes for animal skins in preparation for an ethnographic photo shoot: a regressive act as far as the hegemonic logic of modern progress is concerned. In other words, put slightly differently, what the “native” is questioning is the logic behind a sudden reverse of logic.

The forms of life that were ridiculed by colonialism as uncivilised and savage to the point of violent eradication are now suddenly romantically conjured to the point of valorisation as if to “flip the script”. It is further suggested that Duggan-Cronin travelled from one native reserve to the next, carrying a collection of “tribalesque” items and garments that he reckoned were authentic to that particular tribal look or aesthetic he sought to create and capture. The proficiency of an ethnologist was consulted, in this case G. P. Lastrade, (in Godby 2010) who intellectually frames

2019. The exhibition in its curatorial strategies identifies a nostalgic amnesiac relationship that contemporary art discourse has with the South African canon where troubling racist tropes are either downplayed or erased.

Duggan-Cronin's projects within the discursive context of anthropology. For instance, the first volume of Lastrade's *Bantu Tribes* series is on the Bavenda people. The ease with which Lastrade marks a distinction between Venda facial types is astonishing. His authority on 'Venda' physiognomy could only be affirmed by a structure much more omnipotent than the disciplinary space of twentieth-century anthropology.

The conviction that grounds Lastrade's expertise on black people could only derive the scientific racism that was quickly developed after the abolition of the trade of African slaves. According to Magubane (2007), following the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, scientific racism, with its ethnological foundations, was swiftly established as an effort to freeze Africans and people of African descent into a permanent state of damnation. Ethnography stood as one of the pillars of natural history that, as Sharpley-Whiting (1999:22) suggests, sanctions objects under the gaze to be ordered in a totalising system of representation, this as a result allows "the seen body to be a known body". Lastrade's (in Godby 2010) insightful yet crude descriptions are a case in point, where Venda subjects with "fat faces" and "squat noses" are differentiated from the ones with "flattish faces with thinner and more pointed noses". Such ethnographic commentary, in this instance, works as a corroboration and as an endorsement of Duggan-Cronin's tribalesque portraits portrayed in Figure 3.3

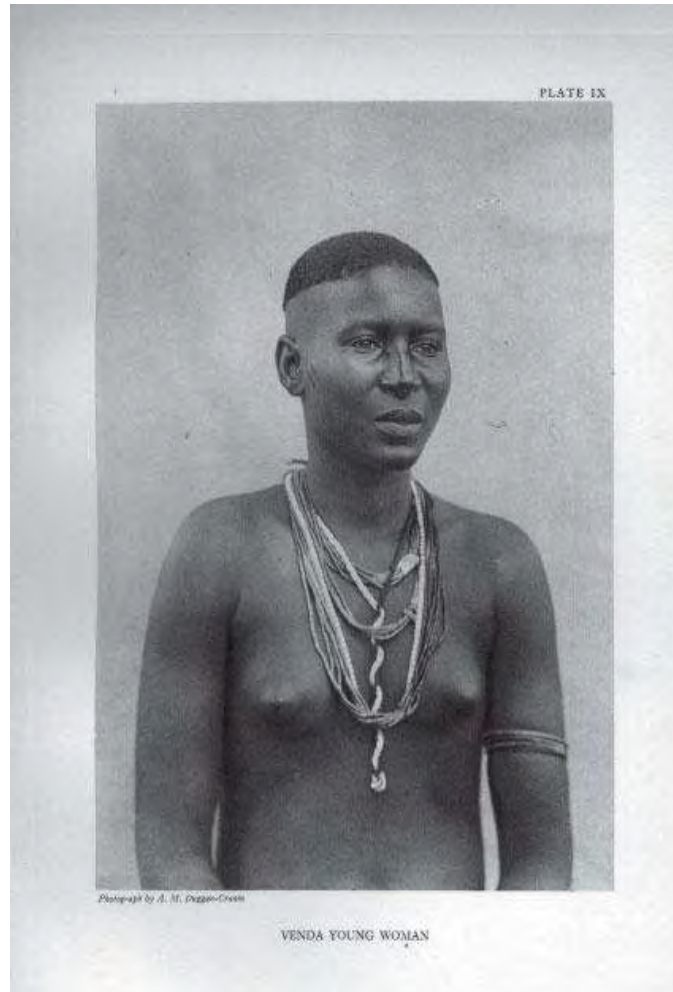


Figure 3.3. Duggan-Cronin, A.M. Plate IX, *Venda young woman*

In recent years, Duggan-Cronin's primitivist scenes have provided continuous creative fodder for contemporary post-apartheid art practices. In the subsequent section, I use the discursive framework of imperial nostalgia as a theoretical tool in order to critically examine the photographic works of Andrew Putter (2013) and Ayana V. Jackson (2013). I have posed questions⁷² to both Jackson and Putter regarding their work in relation to nostalgia, thus my analysis is guided by some of the insights I gleaned from the interviews. Moreover, theoretically, what I put forward as a conceptual lens into reading their work is the ideological premise that underpins imperial nostalgia; the precondition of violence. The violence of nostalgia rarely invites interrogation and

⁷² I have included the interview and the walkabout interview in the appendices.

scrutiny in the canonical literature that historicises it. This section takes conceptual flight from Rosaldo's thesis where the question of violence is placed right at the heart of nostalgia. I also raise the impulse of repetition, concomitant with the affective schema of nostalgia; this aspect I unpack in the following chapter. In my analysis, I consult the following texts that also treat nostalgia as an ideological construct: "Nostalgia's Violence" by Sarah Bracke, "The Nostalgic Subject" by Nauman Naqvi, and Marcos Natali's "History and the Politics of Nostalgia".

3.5 ANDREW PUTTER'S *NATIVE WORK*

On 15 November 2013, I met up with the artist Andrew Putter in order to discuss his recent exhibition, entitled *Native Work* that he had exhibited at the Stevenson Gallery in Cape Town, earlier in the same year. Andrew Putter is a white South African artist who lives and practises in Cape Town, South Africa. In an essay⁷³ "Native Work: An Impulse of Tenderness", written by Putter about his own photography exhibition, the artist metaphorically walks us through the process behind his "artistic response to Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin's lifelong project to photograph black Southern Africans" (Putter 2012:249). His title, *Native Work* conjures some of the dominant features of apartheid. The term "native"⁷⁴ directly evokes the black (African) experience of segregation and dispossession in modern South Africa, as it evokes the pass laws systems that confined black people to tribally designated reserves, also known as Bantustans, which Duggan-Cronin frequented for his photo shoots. However, Putter (2013) indicates that he is reclaiming the title by referring it to himself:

So obviously I am referencing the use of the word native to refer to the African, the Black in a derogatory way, but I am

⁷³Andrew Putter wrote and published this essay as part of his MFA component at the Michaelis School of Fine Art at the University of Cape Town where he obtained his MFA.

⁷⁴The term 'native' derives from the Population Registration Act of Apartheid administration, which relegated the population of South Africa into four groups, Whites, Asians, Coloureds and Natives (Magubane 2007:238). Stripped off their citizenship, Black Africans were referred to as "Natives" who were described as "anyone who belonged or acknowledged belonging to any African native race or tribe" (Magubane 2007:238). Furthermore, in Mahmood Mamdani's (1996) *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, Mamdani (1996:94) states that the shift from race to tribe can be discerned in the 1920s when liberal white opinion came to doubt civilised native policies which loosened tribal bonds. According to Mamdani, in a Rhodes lecture General Jan Smuts stated adamantly that the root of the colour problem in South Africa were urbanised and detribalised natives. As a result, a native administration act was established with an incitement clause that according to Simons (in Mamdani 1996:95) sharpened the realisation that tribalism might be a bulwark against radical movements. A tribal mode of control in the form of Bantustans was necessary in order to split the native majority into compartmentalised minorities (Mamdani 1996:96).

also referencing the fact that I am a native...so there is a double thing happening.⁷⁵

Whilst he is obviously aware of the trickiness that comes with referring to himself, a white South African as a native, with all its associations with exclusion and dispossession, I find this appropriative act interesting, because it could only have a semblance of coherence and utility in post-apartheid democratic South Africa, in so far as it shields whiteness from a retributive scrutiny. Further, Putter foregrounds this tender visual treatment of the native⁷⁶ as an aesthetic strategy that he borrows from Duggan-Cronin. The tenderness that the artist refers to is emboldened in the manner that Duggan-Cronin ‘benevolently’ chose to depict beautifully an otherwise maligned race of black Africans, and he seeks to replicate this approach in his own process:

The more I looked at Duggan-Cronin’s work, the more interested I became in a thread that might be said to run through his portraits. It appears to me as an impulse of tenderness, a desire to show each of his sitters in the most flattering light possible. Duggan-Cronin made photographs which he seemed to hope others would find beautiful ... he laboured to make native South Africans beautiful to those very colonial viewers who would normally consider the subjects of these works as being unworthy of attention by artists.

Andrew Putter’s *Native Work* is led by a similar kind of charitableness, an affective desire for a “social connection” that Putter suggests is historically possible in the aftermath of apartheid. He proceeds to reiterate the aesthetic methods of Duggan-Cronin’s portraits in his attempt to “connect” via the affect of tenderness (Godby 2010:250). The overarching feature of Duggan-Cronin’s images was his blatant act of shielding any noticeable sign of colonial influence from view in his compositions; by omission, he inadvertently re-enacts from the Rosaldo script of imperialist nostalgia. By deliberately removing from the frame any modern references or traces of Western influence, one would think that colonialism was a figment of someone’s imagination: it

⁷⁵ See my interview with Putter in Appendix 2

⁷⁶

is wished away, and there is no detectable trace. In an effort to block the visible symbols that suggested the flow of settler modern time, a time that had radically changed the lives of his sitters, Cronin's images are beautiful first; they eulogise what is deliberately destroyed by the designs of settler modernity.

Duggan-Cronin is an agent and beneficiary of this setup, despite his photographic efforts that position him as an innocent bystander. Looking at his 'Bantu' scenes is like peeking into a precolonial primordial past, a privileged snapshot prior to Western contact. By way of stylistic methods, his calculated use of lighting, the soft focus, a mood of timelessness emanates, evoking the vintage effect of the photogravure methods associated with pictorialism (Godby 2010:63). Subsequently, with the institutional backing of an imperial hand, the mining conglomerate De Beers honoured the photographer by unveiling a gallery in his name –“The Duggan-Cronin Bantu Gallery” (Godby 2012:57). Gazing into Duggan-Cronin's primitivist scenes, Andrew Putter recalls being moved by an “empathetic intimacy”, which again comes from the charity Duggan-Cronin bestows on his native sitters:

In short, Duggan-Cronin was classicizing and humanizing subjects who were typically viewed as wild, subhuman, primitive (Godby 2010:251).

This method of representation evokes the limits of what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1981:16) describes as “radical sympathy” where hope is offered as a painless escape from the contradictions of the day. Emboldened by the similar empathetic impulse, Andrew Putter consults his black friend Thokozile in order to get access to black faces that match Duggan-Cronin's, “Since my network is predominantly white and middle class I needed someone connected to black people of a wide range of ages” (Putter 2013). After having been shown Duggan-Cronin's photographs, Thokozile pointed out that Putter would have difficulty-finding people that look like that in the city and so she recommended he select his sitters from black people that live on the outskirts of Cape Town. In search of an unspoilt “native beauty” of Duggan-Cronin's variety Putter got his sitters from the

far flung townships of Makhaza, Kuyasa and Site B in pursuit of faces that are not “fat”, but instead “look as though they are from a rural past” (Putter 2013:252). In his photos, shot in black and white as if to rival Duggan-Cronin, Putter drapes his sitters in blankets, beads and animal fur fitting to his taste of the “tribal or traditional”, see Figure 3.4.



Figure 3.4. Andrew Putter draping sitter with a blanket, 2012

Thirty-eight portraits materialised from the process. Half of the thirty-eight were composed of a twin set of portraits depicting each sitter in a garment of their choice, an option granted by the artist photographer as if to correct and improve on Duggan-Cronin’s cruder “tribalesque” approach:

I asked the sitters if they wished to choose how to dress themselves for a formal colour portrait: all of them did. It is a second colour series moved somewhat in the direction of representing sitters as they see themselves. More importantly, seen in relation to the black and white ethnographic portraits, they have the effect of complicating the assumptions the viewer might make about the sitters, the place of the costume in the portraits, the role of the photographer (Putter 2013: 253).

Imperialist Nostalgia is a posture of innocence that seeks to obscure and conceal complicity. It offers a version of history and events in a manner that assuages guilt and therefore deflects responsibility for the crimes committed against temporal others (Rosaldo 1989). Andrew suggests a sense of kindness by the act of the artist granting his sitters the option or the agency of wearing the clothes of their choice for the second portrait, as seen in Figure 3.6.



Figure 3.5. Putter, A. *Sihle Mngwazana as an Initiate*, 2012



Figure 3.6. Putter, A. *Sihle Mnqwazana in attire of his own choice*, 2012

This is a false alternative that covertly suggesting that his black sitters have it better now than in the past, when their ancestors would have been rounded up into Bantustan native reserves, where Duggan-Cronin could go into and take romantic photographs of an oppressed and dispossessed people. To echo Saidiya Hartman (1997) in *Scenes of Subjection*, agency is not some sort of gift that can be dispensed by writers, historians and photographers alike when it suits them. What we have here between the soft primitivisms of Duggan-Cronin and Andrew Putter is a fetishistic form of aggrandisement achieved through certain visual practices that occur in the face of something more difficult to confront. Putter and Duggan-Cronin's 'tender' visual treatment of black subjects re-centres the positions they occupy as heroic and exceptional. Putter's introduction to the accompanying essay is a giveaway (Putter 2013:250):

Hi. I am Andrew. I'm white gay, racist South African who was born at the height of apartheid (in 1965), and grew up in

Pinelands, a middle-class, racially segregated suburb of Cape Town. It is virtually impossible for apartheid-era South Africans like myself not to have been deeply affected by apartheid.

From reading Andrew Putter's text and the images, we are presented with a bifurcated paradigm that could easily be interpreted into a mainstream post-apartheid anti-racist narrative. Firstly, the act of depicting black people through a beautifying and flattering lens (in their native costumes) may automatically seem like a subversive act, especially when considered against the backdrop of a colonial-racist archive whose common sense was to pathologise the black body. Duggan-Cronin's act of subversion is made apparent in the quote below:

He laboured to make native South Africans beautiful to those colonial viewers who would normally consider the subjects of these works as being unworthy of attention by artists (Putter 2012:250).

Duggan-Cronin's subversion, the act of sublimating something considered abject by colonial standards, is appreciated as an admired act of anti-racism that I believe is the impulse that moves Putter to reiterate and repeat it via *Native Work* in a post-apartheid setting. Putter and Duggan-Cronin bestow 'beauty' upon their native sitters as if it is a gift. This brings to mind Derek Hook's (2014:94) notion of "charitable anti-racism" that I will later come back to. The second aspect of this two-pronged paradigm relates to the "Hi. I'm Andrew. I am a white gay racist South African" declarative statement. This type of speech act has taken a noteworthy significance in post-apartheid anti-racist discourse, recalling what Sarah Ahmed defines as a white declaration.

According to Ahmed (in Hook 2014:92), white declarations are hinged on fantasies of a transcendence, where what is transcended is the very thing admitted to in the declaration. In other words, admitting to one's racism through a speech act becomes a form of exoneration from one's racism. In the declaration, one gets to prove that one is a well-intentioned non-racist "because real racists don't know that they are racists" (2014:92). The declarative speech act becomes an anti-

racist end in itself. While we may perceive this act as a gesture of anti-racism, this act remains strategically locked at the level of a speech act. Though it may be incomplete, it in fact serves as a useful task. It allows the declarers to imagine themselves as occupying some kind of an outside position in relation to whiteness. The gesture of declaring whiteness allows the declarer to win on two fronts. To quote Steve Biko, in his apt critique on white liberalism (1978:22), “In this way they (white liberals) remain in the good books with both the black and the white worlds”. To reiterate my earlier point on charitable anti-racism, this form of charity depends on a fantasy of being able to bestow the gift of anti-racism on the native, as reflected in the primitivist works of both Duggan-Cronin and Andrew Putter, which celebrate alterity by putting it on a pedestal. From this angle, alterity is recognisably infused with positive value, raised into a higher status; in other words, it is sublimated. I argue that this emanates from an imperialist nostalgia as defined by Rosaldo (1989) which we now see unfold in post-apartheid art practice. Here a culture, a form of life, an environment, is destroyed, yet it is the perpetrator that laments the death. Nostalgia becomes a strategy of innocence, an evasion of guilt and responsibility. The nostalgic ironically eulogises and pays homage to the very thing that was considered degenerate and irredeemable (Araguc 2012:2).

In his photographic oeuvre, Duggan-Cronin exhibits a sentimental respect for colonised cultures. Andrew Putter further reiterates this in his sentimental reverence in *Native Work: An Impulse of Tenderness*. As Rosaldo (1989) points out, imperialist nostalgia makes racial domination appear innocent and pure by making colonisers appear as though they respect what they have tried to destroy. I further argue that this form of nostalgia peddles the fantasy of anti-racism, made possible through the veneration of colonised people, also under the rubric of ‘going native’, with the implication here being the rejection of whiteness particularly in its colonial form. Additionally, an altruistic spirit of ‘doing good’ is detectable here; it brings to mind ‘the white man’s burden’ and it lurks in between lines such as:

All of the people who modelled in my pictures were paid ...
and were transported the long distance from their homes to my
studio ... they were given lunch and tea. Putter (2012:253)

One wonders if the artist would have found it necessary to include this information had the sitters not been black. Putter's statement reads like somewhat of a defence; it indirectly positions him as not one of those whites who exploits black people for their own gain. At his most revealing, Putter (2012:252) states that:

In the process of getting to know the people who modelled for me, it struck me that the beauty I had seen in them as consequence of my seduction by Duggan-Cronin's archive was paralleled by a growing sense of their beauty as contemporaries of mine. This may seem obvious, even overly romantic, but remember that my ideas about all these things were changing rapidly. So intense were these changes that even my dreams began to change: one night I dreamt I was black.

The act of visually representing blacks as decorative objects also unfolds from the white liberal predisposition of 'corrective' charity work, a 'tenderness' that is rationalised as a subversion of whiteness and its colonial formation. It does not stop here. Something rather ominous is imminently detectable in the quotation above. A form of cultural consumption, or more pointedly a form of cannibalism, is made possible through the obvious asymmetrical relations of power. Put differently, it is the cannibalisation of blackness that makes it possible for the artist to subconsciously identify himself as black: "one night I dreamt I was black". In her essay, "Eating the other", bell hooks (1992) suggests that fantasies of contact with the other are actually embedded in the secret (or not so secret) structure of white supremacy. She supports that these longings are indeed brought to the surface via a primitivism with a post-modern inflection (1992:366). hooks calls it "Eating the other" – an enjoyment of racial difference.

3.6 AYANA V. JACKSON'S *ARCHIVAL IMPULSE*

How does the practice of archival art translate in a transitional context like post-apartheid South Africa, with a past that is saturated in violence and a present that is marked by an indescribable trauma? One may start by acknowledging that post-apartheid temporality, in its everyday manifestation, is characterised by historical dissonance; in other words, “by the continuous juxtaposition of forward and backward looking temporalities” (Hook 2014:05). This has laid a fertile ground for a nostalgic turn in post-apartheid visual culture, namely its capacity to retrieve repressed facets of colonial-apartheid history.

Ayana V. Jackson is a self-taught visual artist photographer who was born in Mexico and raised in New Jersey, and who now lives and works between South Africa, Paris and the United States. In 2013, I attended a walkabout of her exhibition *Archival Impulse*⁷⁷. The exhibition walkabout was at Gallery MOMO in Johannesburg where I posed to her some questions pertaining to my research question on nostalgia and the practice of art in post-apartheid South Africa. One of the main reasons that drew me to *Archival Impulse* is the dynamic way that the artist uses her own body as an archive in order to make aesthetic, historical and social commentary. In this way, we begin to think about the archive as flesh, as a carrier of not just personal memory but of historical memory that determines how we move and extend ourselves in the world. To think of the body as a carrier of historical information, can enable us to understand how our bodies determine our reach in the world or the lack thereof. This brings to mind Sarah Ahmed's (2007) discussion in “The Phenomenology of Whiteness” where she suggests that it is in relation to our bodies that we inherit the reachability of some objects. For instance, one of the reasons why whiteness can be described as a public comfort is because it allows bodies to extend into spaces that have already taken their shape. Ahmed (2007:158) goes on to say that:

⁷⁷ She borrows this title from Hal Foster's (2004) article, “An Archival Impulse”.

Those spaces are lived as comfortable as they allow bodies to fit in; the surfaces of social space are already impressed upon by the shape of such bodies (Ahmed 2007:158)

In turn, this is why I find it pertinent that she prefaced her walkabout by saying that her work emanates from the experience of living in a black women's body, in a world that is designed to receive black women's bodies in particular ways. She uses her body as an archive, as an inheritance that connects her to the black women whose lives she embodies and re-enacts in her photographs. Jackson has a specialised background in sociology and perhaps this is why she speaks with great contextual clarity. She starts us off by stating that she will begin at the end, pointing to the work entitled *Case #33 I–VI*, referencing case 33 at the *Musee de l'Homme* where Sarah Baartman's skeleton was preserved and kept. As if to correct the commonly accepted status of Baartman as a mere victim, particularly in the manner that she has been reduced to a collection of body parts, Jackson emphasises that:

Sarah Baartman spoke four languages, lived in two continents and lived in three countries; she was a cosmopolitan woman (Jackson 2013).

Yet when one thinks of her, one thinks of her in a state of nakedness. The first image that comes to mind when Baartman is mentioned is not an image of Baartman dressed in the Victorian attire, which she would have worn every day in the Victorian society where she lived her adult life in Western Europe. This is a compelling point as it speaks to the objective authority of the gaze of the Western spectator. This brings to mind the words of German critic, Ivan Goll, after he had first seen Josephine Baker's *La Revue de Negres*; he subsequently proclaims, "The African, regardless of elaborate costuming, is in essence always naked...They have put on clothes only to show that clothes don't exist for them"(Jiminez in Isaak 1999:11). As Jiminez (in Isaak 1999:11) argues in her essay "Performing the Hott-en-tot", the Western spectator has the function of disrobing the African. In the instance, when I asked Ayana Jackson if she ever considers a black spectatorship in the process of making her work, she responded with the following:

Yes and no, honestly I hate to say this, but I am not concerned with a black spectatorship, it was very interesting at the first week after the opening, and the sheer number of white-haired, white men were coming in the gallery and I was sitting there thinking, what are they thinking? Like why are they here, but once I stopped to talk to them I found out that some of them were researchers and that one of them had a Ph.D. in archival photography. This is after having projected on to them, I did not know about the rest of the people there. Like I said when we were in the other room is that we are all victims of this kind of imagery, we are all victims of what this imagery has imprisoned in our minds and how it has given birth to tropes in photography, in the media, with regard to what black bodies are photographed, what black bodies are not photographed, how black bodies are being photographed and going back to the poverty pornography also and the black body as spectacle.

Although the argument in this thesis disagrees in part with her point that we are all equal victims of the type of imagery that she intervenes in, I believe her statement suggests to us perhaps in an unintended way, to whom her images are designed. Jackson presents a series of compelling photographs that depict staged scenes extracted from the imperial archive⁷⁸. One of her more striking images in the series is fittingly titled *Diorama*⁷⁹, (Fig.3.8). The word *diorama* literally means, “Through that which is seen”, deriving etymologically from the Greek *di-* “through” and *orama* “that which is seen, a sight”. In this framework, the diorama works as an apparatus through which we see the native in his or her simulated natural habitat, much like the dioramas we typically encounter in natural history museums. Furthermore, it becomes apparent how the scientific-zoological gaze intersects with an aesthetic gaze in the visualisation of the black subject in the white world.

In her catalogue, Jackson includes the original photograph that she uses as a close reference point for Figure 3.8, the original image. Figure 3.7 is a sepia-toned photograph that has faded and lost detail over the years. It was taken at a human zoo in Paris. It depicts eight people assembled

⁷⁸ The artist compiled and inserted the original reference images in the catalogue; I have included the relevant archival material in the list of illustrations.

⁷⁹ It is worth noting that, by definition, a diorama is a model with three-dimensional figures representing a scene that is set against a painted background; one typically encounters dioramas in museums (Online Etymology Dictionary 2016)

against a plain background that resembles a studio setting. Three people are standing and the other five are seated on a mat in front of them; we meet their gaze. Those on the mat are seated in a corresponding manner, giving a contrived quality to the composition. All of the nude⁸⁰ figures are black except the white bearded man who is attired. He is the tallest in the frame; prominent, he towers over everyone. He stands at an angle facing the right, and his eyes look away from the frame of the pictorial space.



Figure 3.7. A group of Andaman people in a human zoo in Paris, 1869. Photographer unknown.

The composition of Jackson's Diorama, Figure 3.8, closely resembles the original photograph, Figure 3.7; however, there are some noteworthy alterations, which read as post-colonial interventions. Ayana uses her nude body to occupy all the positions coordinated in Figure

⁸⁰ The use of the term "nude" instead of naked draws slightly from John Berger's premise in *Ways of Seeing*. He advances the idea that nakedness is simply a state of having no clothes on; I agree here. Further, he claims that nudity is a form of artistic representation. I differ slightly: for the purposes of my argument, nudity is a form of representation contingent on a gaze; however, the nude is not limited to artistic representation only. Moreover, the black figures in the scenes described are configured for the purpose of being viewed by a Western, a specifically white, spectatorship. If the nude is a costume one puts on for the purpose of being seen by another then, in this context, the black nude is garbed in a stereotype that is legible and enjoyable through the lens of whiteness

3.8. In Figure 3.9, in the position previously occupied by the white master we now see a black madam standing authoritatively; looking down at the black figures below her.

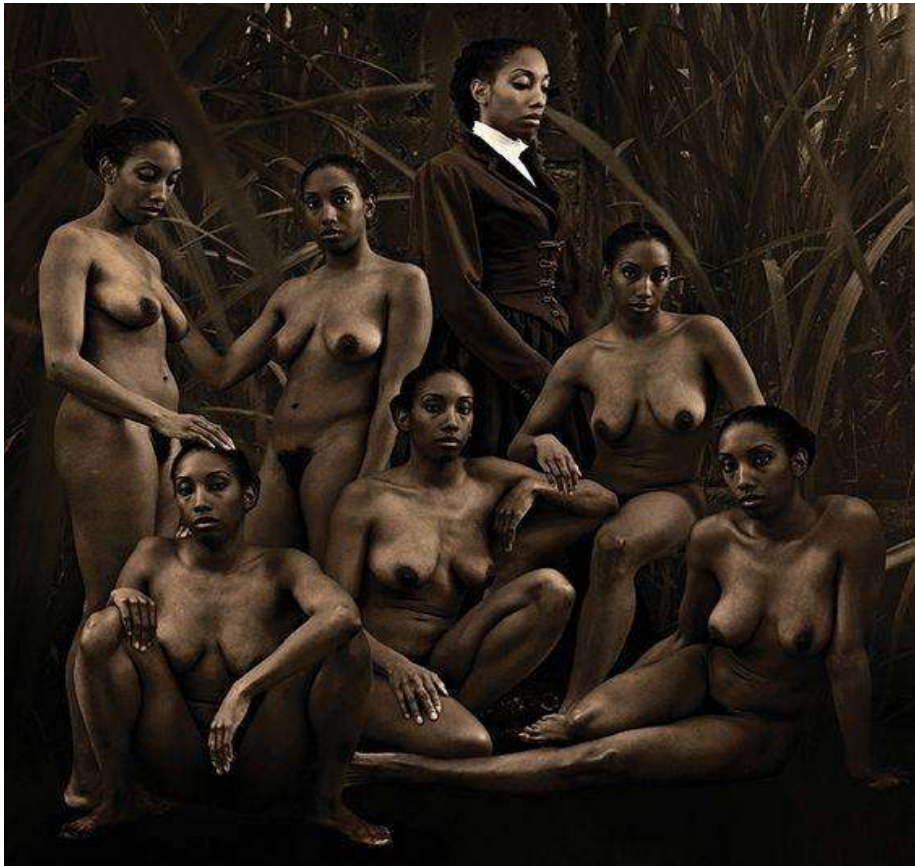


Figure 3.8. Jackson, V.A. *Diorama I*, 2012

Demons and Devotees, Figure 3.9, elaborates on this aspect, where we are confronted by the stark nudity of the black female bodies amassed in a pyramid formation. At the apex of the pyramid of black bodies stands Ayana, looking angelic in white clothes, bringing to mind the dubious self-righteousness of the missionary saviour complex.



Figure 3.9. Jackson, A.V. *Demons and Devotees I*, 2012



Figure 3.10. The missionary Alice Seeley Harris posing at the top of a pyramid of Congolese children, Democratic Republic of Congo, 1869. Reproduction taken from Ayana V. Jackson's *Archival Impulse* exhibition catalogue. Parktown: Gallery MOMO

It is important to note that Ayana V. Jackson is the photographer behind the lens – she takes the pictures of herself – in other words, she is the bearer of the gaze and an object of the gaze. This visually plays out in her being nude and clothed at the same time; in one frame, she straddles both positions, simultaneously evoking a Duboisian double consciousness. This implies that she is outside and inside the pictorial frame; she is within and without, symbolically echoing the notion of looking at oneself through the lens of others. Interestingly in her interpretation in Figure 3.8, where the background was a plain blank wall, the artist inserts dense grass-like foliage creating an enclosure around the black figures. The monochromatic use of sepia creates visual cohesion across the spectrum; more evocatively, it makes black bodies look as though they emerge from the jungle.

The visual language of the Diorama and *Demons and Devotees I* picks up from an over-familiar narrative about Africa; at a quick glance they look like scenes lifted out of a colonial travelogue: primitivist tropes abound. Jackson cuts close to the bone; she treads on a tightrope, balancing between pastiche, parody and satire, without a semblance of humour. Something has to be said about the fact that these images remain exquisitely beautiful despite the tragic subject matter they draw from. What we witness as spectators is the aesthetic legibility of humiliation and suffering. The philosopher and political theorist Achille Mbembe writes the catalogue essay for Ayana Jackson's exhibition. In the catalogue, there is a section titled 'Forbidden Pleasures, Exercises in Autophagia', Mbembe refers to the condition "autophagy", this is a term germane to the thematic constellation of my argument; that pertains to the visual archive as a primal scene. The primal scene is not just generative to scopophilia but also generative to an identity/ego negation and formation, which implicates a sadomasochistic encounter. Autophagia occurs when one is compelled to inflict pain upon oneself by biting and/or devouring portions of one's body. Individuals affected by this disorder feel a sense of arousal before committing the act, and then experience pleasure, gratification or relief at the time of committing the act. From this definition,

it is clear why the term is appropriate to describe the experience of engaging with this visual archive. Although from reading Mbembe's essay it is not immediately clear whom is performing the "exercises of autophagia". However in relation to my argument, if looking is an act of consumption, then autophagia is a relevant reference that evokes the ways in which a black spectatorship is positioned to look at the image and consume themselves as depicted in a negated form. I sense that the pleasure, gratification and relief that comes from being coerced to devour one's own flesh emerges from a sadomasochistic realm.

In referring to the images, Achille Mbembe remarks (2013), "they are beautiful first, and pain becomes secondary". This brings to mind Susan Sontag's (2003:81) ruminations in *Regarding the Pain of Others*:

Photographs objectify: they turn an event or a person into something that can be possessed. And photographs are a species of alchemy; for all that, they are prized as a transparent account of reality.

Often something looks, or is felt to look, "better" in a photograph. One of the functions of photography is to improve the normal appearance of things. Beautifying is one of the classic operations of the camera, and it tends to bleach out a moral response to what is shown (Sontag 2003:72). The images are first faithful to the technical excellence that systemically defines beautiful artwork; the photographs look good. However, it is precisely in their beauty that an imminent erasure is lodged. Jackson recalls this past, nostalgically, in a selective manner that conceals, reveals, and more so, heightens, the beauty of the scene. For instance in Figure 3.11, *Death*, we see the artist dangling gracefully from a tree; the background of the photograph has been manipulated through a polarised filter. One has to look closely in order to properly see the white rope that blends into the background; the rope is tied around the artist's neck indicating that this is a lynching scene.

As noted by one of the viewers at the walkabout⁸¹ when she walked into the venue, the exhibition space, she was not aware that it was lynching scene as from afar, the image looks really beautiful and inviting until one moves closer and sees the image from a closer perspective. Jackson's glistening lynching scene is very different from the gruesome bulging eyes and the twisted mouths in Billie Holiday's iconic *Strange Fruit*⁸² whose chilling mood can be detected in the source photograph in Figure 3.12. Jackson powerfully emphasises the beauty of the image as Mbembe (2013) describes that there is nothing about the artist's rendition that makes the viewer want to look away, instead the image seduces and brings the viewer closer. Perhaps the artist's beautiful rendering, the remembering of lynching in this aesthetically pleasing way reminds us the uncomfortable truth that lynching were in part settings where viewers enjoyed themselves and were entertained by the sight of burning black flesh, whose parts they collected and kept safely as mementos. Although this is a powerful narrative that one can read from Jackson's visual methods, one cannot help but notice that in her version, Figure 3.11, in stark contrast to Figure 3.12, the viewers in the lynch mob have been removed from the scene. In Jackson's scene, the white lynch mob – some who proudly point at the dead bodies hanging from the trees whilst making eye contact with the camera – have been erased from the scene and taken out of view. How do we interpret this move? Could we think of it as an erasure of white culpability? One can think of the various ways that such a removal of the white viewers in the photograph could provide a form of relief for contemporary viewers who perhaps would not want to directly confront this truth. This could be further interpreted as the visual memory work of nostalgia that infamously sanitises as it selects.

⁸¹ This walkabout took place on the 10th of October 2013 at Gallery MOMO in Parktown Johannesburg. I have included the transcript in the appendices

⁸² *Strange Fruit* is the title of a protest song famously sung by the American jazz singer Billie Holiday. *Strange Fruit* tells the story of racist antiblack lynchings that took place in the American South and it was first performed in 1939. Some of the song's memorable lyrics are as follows "Southern trees bear strange fruit, blood on the leaves and blood at the root, black bodies swinging in the southern breeze, strange fruit hanging from the poplar tree".

Figure 3.11 has sadomasochistic inflections and seductive ambiguities that illustrate a futility of ethics when it comes to the prevailing myths about black bodies. The most enduring one is that black people are insensate, black people do not feel.



Figure 3.11. Jackson, V. A. *Death*, 2012



Figure 3.12. Photographer Unknown. *The lynching of Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith*, Marion Indiana, 1930. Reproduction taken from Ayana V. Jackson's *Archival Impulse* exhibition catalogue. Parktown: Gallery MOMO.

The denial of someone's pain is a form of torture that heightens pleasure (Farley 1997:470). Evoking ethical stance as a kind of protective measure in post-apartheid South Africa is akin to grazing the surface of an iceberg, whilst ignoring its rock-hard underlying structure. Post-apartheid South Africa has hereditary attachments to apartheid's visual regime of sadomasochistic enjoyments. In a similar vein, I believe that Judith Butler notably gestures towards an ethical charge against the technology of photography. In *Torture and the Ethics of Photography*, Judith Butler (2007) articulates the complicity of the camera, and by extension the white gaze, in the unfolding spectacle of the violent scene; she gestures towards the aesthetics of sadomasochism:

Is the taking of the photo, a way of participating in the event it depicts? If so in what way? Perhaps the camera promises a festive cruelty: 'Oh good the camera is here, let us begin the torture so that the photograph might capture and commemorate our act!' If so the photograph is already at work prompting, framing and orchestrating the act, the photograph captures the moment at its accomplishment. The photograph is a kind of

promise that the event will continue. Does the photograph continue the act in the present? Butler (2007:959)

Photographs are ritual substances that conduit a return; a repetition, a non-forgetting; they haunt. They are, as Hook (2014:70) describes, a sum of multiple concurrent temporal modes. At every appearance they invite participation, and they demand the presence of a spectatorship. It is in the question of spectatorship we can better comprehend the complexity of sadomasochistic enjoyment that is heightened by the aesthetic regiment of art practice. Spectators in art are often positioned and aligned to admire and enjoy reiterated and rearticulated ‘scenes of suffering’. In *Scenes of Subjection*, Saidiya V. Hartman (1997:8) remarks that the crimes of slavery (akin to the ones of colonialism and apartheid) are not only witnessed but also staged, and she further affirms “the constitution of blackness as an abject and degraded condition and the fascination with the other’s enjoyment went hand in hand”.

Nostalgia’s Sadomasochism

Nostalgic recall can be argued to enhance the erasure and denial of black pain. This denial of black pain via the sanitising gestures of nostalgia are in concert with an already established trope and myth about the black body as insensate, as inherently able to withstand extreme violence and abuse. This fantasy exists in order to naturalise subjugation and subjection. In the racist fantasy, the black body enjoys its own subjection. Rape fantasies are another example where the victim is imagined as a complicit collaborator: as enjoying his or her own sexual violation. In his essay “The Black Body as Fetish Object” Anthony Farley (1997) makes this aforementioned comparison between rape and race in his prefatory statements, when he introduces the idea of sadomasochism. In order for the idea of sadomasochism to make sense, he interprets race as a form of experiencing pleasure in one’s body, this pleasure is sadomasochistic in its nature. Farley (1997:461) defines sadomasochism as:

It is the process which one man tries to transform another into a mere object of his will. The masochist is delighted by the

spectacle of himself as the object of another's will. The attitudes are, of course linked.

He links this perverted form of pleasure to the race dynamic. According to Farley (1997:458) within this schema, whiteness becomes a way of feeling pleasure in and about one's body and the "sprawled and distorted" black body is necessary to fulfilling the desire and promise of race pleasure. Farley states that the reason race seems permanent is because we fail to remember that it is a sight, site and cite of enjoyment. This is similar to the way that "Pecola's ugliness" in Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* enables everyone to feel beautiful, and her weakness make others feel potent (Khan and Rahman 2014: 26). Morrison reveals how the idealisation of whiteness predominantly depends on the degradation of the "other". The denial of this pleasure merely serves to reinforce the pleasure of denying what one has done or is doing.

Masochism is a form of pleasure that emerges when the victim positively identifies with the image of their own negation; this is what Farley (1997:311) identifies as the suffering-pleasure in becoming the object, in other words when one becomes the stereotype. This is when the black person experiences the white gazes and its pleasure as their own, looking at themselves through the white gaze and accepting its debasing standards as natural and as deserved. This line of thinking is both difficult and tricky, as I do not fully support the argument that black people enjoy their own suffering in a deliberate way. However, I do agree with the notion of the fantasy, the fantasy that they derive pleasure from their own debasement. The idea of the fantasy holds water; particularly in relation to the visual examples that I analyze in chapter five, "Suffering and Smiling". In the art film documentary *Enjoy Poverty* the local Congolese photographers are encouraged by the Dutch Belgian artist Renzo Martens to take and distribute wretched photos of malnourished children and dead black corpses because that is what the world wants to see, "experiencing your suffering makes me a better person" Martens quips. Within the scope of archival art practice, particularly with the work of Ayana V. Jackson, *Archival Impulse* it enables an entry into this touchy and tricky terrain of the sadomasochistic dynamic, which remains largely unnamed and under-engaged in

contemporary archival art practice for the obvious discomfort that it elicits. It takes a particularly renewed resonance within the structure of feeling of nostalgia, where we are positioned to remember the past with fondness and implicates the lurking spectre of black suffering as unthought.

CHAPTER FOUR: POST-APARTHEID

NOSTALGIA/RESTORATIVE NOSTALGIA AND ITS IMAGES OF COMMON SENSE

4. READING POST-APARTHEID TEMPORALITY FROM AN AFRO-PESSIMISTIC PERSPECTIVE

The release of Nelson Mandela from prison in 1990 and his subsequent inauguration in 1994 represent South Africa's contested entry into the realm of post-coloniality⁸³; these two events also affirm the beginning of South Africa's post-racial phase. In this chapter, I argue that both real and representational forces work in tandem to restrain the future; this is suggested by the transference of the black subject/object from one state of 'unfreedom to the next, resonating a cyclical pattern. Colonial temporality is a closed circuit, a "hellish cycle"⁸⁴, wherein the past overwhelms the present at the expense of a movement towards the future (Frantz Fanon 1952, 2008: 107).

Apartheid brutality is somatic and as such, the crux of my analysis attends to the *visuality*⁸⁵ of the black body in the post-apartheid South Africa. The violence that characterises apartheid's visual scenes is knowable through the visible mutilation and abjection of black bodies and this continues unabated after apartheid. This chapter is written from the position that the enslavement of Africans was not an event nor an occasion, but an ongoing shape-shifting relational paradigm of coloniality that also finds expression in the structure of settler colonialism, apartheid and its

⁸³As a consequence, the use of the prefix 'post' simultaneously enters into the discursive lexicon, signalling the new: a "premature" arrival of the future (Magubane 2005:129). From 1999, at the turn of the century into a new millennium, terms such as "post-transitionality" and "post post-apartheid" entered the fray, echoing the linear logic of progress, embedded in colonial settler modernity (Frenkel and Mackenzie 2010:3).

⁸⁴ According to Fanon (1952, 2008:107) only a violent explosion can shatter this closed circuit of repeated colonial temporality

⁸⁵ "Visuality" is a term that distinctively emanates from the post-modern spectrum of visual culture, also known as visual studies, as foregrounded in Nicholas Mirzoeff's seminal text *On Visuality* (1996) and in his expansive text *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (2002). In his definition of 'visuality', Mirzoeff consults the work of Hal Foster (1988) in *Vision and Visuality*.

aftermath. Afropessimist analysis of slavery as an ontological relation as opposed to an experiential one, proffers valuable insights into the state of racial relations in the contemporary moment. It is with this mode of analysis in mind that this chapter will examine how the visual scenes of apartheid continue to calibrate the psycho-social life of South Africa through their *repetition* and *return* in both real life and in art and media representation.

Afropessimism is an analytical lens founded on the particular readings of texts by Hortense Spillers (1987, 2003) Orlando Patterson (1982) Frantz Fanon (1952, 2008); it sets out to amend and elaborate theories on black subjectivity relying on humanist discourse. Afropessimism postulates that “a ruse of analogy” is often relied upon to position blacks coherently in the world, specifically within the human fold (Wilderson 2010: 35). This reading of blackness is inaccurate. Hartman (1997), Wilderson (2010) and others claim that this humanising gesture, by way of analogy, mystifies and erases the specificity of the black grammar of suffering, that which is centred on their status as sub/non/anti-human that is predicated on accumulation and fungibility (Hartman 1997; Wilderson 2010:37). Under the critique of Afropessimism, blackness is understood less as a cultural identity, in its constituent form; blackness is understood ontologically, through the components of slavery, such as social death, natal alienation and general dishonour (Walsh 2016: 70). From this framework, we may begin to think of the historic development of the human as directly based on the negation of the human status of ‘the Black’. Therefore it could only seem natural for the same people who valorised freedom as the highest expression of enlightenment to enslave and colonize Africans. Stuggen (2014:30) states, “This was only possible through the radical distinction between the white human and the black animal”

Wilderson (2010) asserts that the violence that transforms the African into a thing is without analogue; in other words, it is incomparable to other forms of human suffering. Wilderson (2010) illustrates this by using the example that, for instance, Jews went into Auschwitz and came out as Jews; however, Africans went into ships and came out as blacks: the belly of the boat

through the middle passage wiped out the blacks' metaphysics. This metaphysical transformation has major implications for those who were not captured; transatlantic racial slavery had a radically transformative effect on Africans globally, regardless of whether the African is on the ship or the continent, thus, within this schema, enslavement and blackness are entangled and indivisible. In relation to the rest of the world, the occurrence of the transatlantic slavery also relegates Africans as slaves in relation to the rest of humanity. Moreover, this unfolds despite the fact that continental Africans may still know themselves through indigenous cultural accoutrements.⁸⁶ Nonetheless, access to indigenous cultures, traditions, customs, values, and performances does not undo or transcend the "the fact of blackness". To put this another way, for example, the ability to speak an African language does not "deniggrize"⁸⁷ the status of the black in the world; it does not temper the fact that one is viewed and treated as an object in a world of subjects.

For instance the status of free blacks was shaped and compromised by the existence of slavery. From this position we start to recognise colonialism as the "second coming", made possible through slavery; in this regard colonialism and slavery are like echo chambers; echoing one another (Mngxitama 2014). Achille Mbembe's (2015) text *On the Postcolony* reads Africa more as a slave estate⁸⁸ than as a colony. To further elaborate on this point, I turn directly to

⁸⁶ This is a term I borrow from Frank Wilderson (2009) where he reflects on Africa's lack of sovereign integrity.

The argument presented in this paper claims that at a higher level of abstraction Africa can be understood as a slave dwelling, where black Africans have had to negotiate captivity.

⁸⁷ "Deniggrize" is a term used generally in America to describe blacks who may think of themselves as being detached from the negative stereotypes that define blackness. In this way, deniggrization would describe the state of having transcended one's blackness. Arguably the closest equivalence to the term nigger in the context of South Africa is kaffir, a term that in Arabic translates to "unbeliever". According to Simons (1969:14) in his text *Class and Colour in South Africa 1850-1950* this derogatory term was used towards Africans in South Africa. Although the term kaffir is not readily embraced in popular culture in the same way as nigger, there have been public appeals made by the like of Trevor Noah the internationally acclaimed South African comedian for the term to be embraced in a positive way. In his comedic performance *That's Racist*, Noah (2012) encourages South Africans to call themselves kaffirs, he further advocates to start a National Kaffir Day. Quoted in a New York Times article in 2016, the trustee of the Steve Biko Foundation, Millard Arnold, states that The K-word here and the N-word in the States are essentially vehicles for expressing hate and are a way of demeaning another. Arnold supports that in both societies, those two words resonate virtually in the same way. Historically the term was used by Muslim Arab slave traders to describe Africans in Southern Africa and in the Indian subcontinent, who are the descendants of slaves who were taken across the Indian Ocean from East Africa (Ali in Danver 2013: 535). The term kaffir derives from *caf're*, which is phonetically closer to the Arab way of pronouncing the word. According to Omar Ali (in Danver 2013: 535), at the beginning of the 16th century *caf're* was a term generally used by Portuguese explorers to describe people of African descent and interestingly the Portuguese were the first European slave traders of African people. In South Africa, kaffir is akin to the term nigger in that it is used derogatively used to refer to black Africans. Even Mahatma Gandhi advocated for the rights of Indians in South Africa by arguing that Indians should not be reduced to the state of "a raw kaffir".

⁸⁸ Bernard Magubane (2007:232) inadvertently suggests this point when he states that Africans on the continent through commerce, colonisation and Christianity were reduced to conditions that were tantamount to slavery. Think of the King Leopold's Belgian Congo. Africans were not legally defined as slaves in a commoditised sense, however, as Lowe(2004) suggests, the fact that they were to be 'civilised' through the 'civilising mission', this places them outside of the margins of civil society as constituted by the law which denied them full legal personhood. <http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse>.

Mbembe's introduction "Time on the Move"; here Mbembe (2015:13) advances that "the ramifications of the slave trade remain unknown to us; to a large extent, the trade was the event through which Africa was born to modernity". Mbembe's (2015:1) argument is interestingly in congruence with Afropessimism's aforementioned recognition of the African/black as non-human⁸⁹:

Africa is never seen as possessing things and attributes properly part of human nature ... its things and attributes are generally of lesser value, little importance, and poor quality. It is this elementariness and primitiveness that makes Africa the world par excellence of all that is incomplete, mutilated and unfinished ... at another level discourse on Africa is always deployed in the framework of meta-text about the animal—to be exact, about the beast (2015:1)

According to Wilderson (2010), the slave is not a labourer but an anti-human. The role of visibility cannot be overstated in this recognition and identification of the black as slave; as Fanon iterates, "I am a slave not of an idea others have of me but of my own appearance" (Fanon 1967:115). Wilderson (2010:37) affirms that it is indeed the visual field where "my own appearance" is the threshold that distinguishes and elaborates the division between the human and the black. Thus, the "bestial" portrayal of the African elaborates this subhuman status that Mbembe refers to in the preceding quote. The role of visibility cannot be overstated in the recognition and identification of the black as slave.

The visual field is the first point from which difference is marked: the epidermal schema. This difference is the threshold that distinguishes and elaborates the division between the human and the black . That is to say that if we think about the fact that slavery has always existed in the world, for instance in classical Europe and in Africa, what makes the middle passage

⁸⁹ In Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze's (1997) *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader*, Eze outlines how the project of European enlightenment and humanism is predicated on the subhuman status

catastrophically transformative is the epidermal mark of inferiority that relegates the ontological status of Africans as slaves.

The question of the spatio-temporal configuration of the black subject–object can be explored through a deep synthesis of Fanon’s ideas pertaining to the temporality of colonial existence. Kara Keeling (2003) provides an apt meditation on this question in her essay “In the Interval”. Keeling (2003:97) outlines that:

The spatio-temporal co-ordinates at which the black’s inferiority comes into being through the other, is colonialism’s foundation; yet, its particular spatial co-ordinates have been obliterated, universalised and its specific temporal co-ordinates have become unknowable because the black’s inferiority is constantly reinstated. The temporality of colonialism shackles life into the past as a way of rationalizing colonial existence. Fanon characterises colonial temporality in terms of a “hellish cycle” or an “infernal cycle” wherein the past overwhelms the present at the expense of a movement towards the future that might be different from the past.

One has to consider nostalgia in relation to the temporal apparatus that Keeling outlines under the direction of Fanon. Nostalgia is a method of remembering and forgetting that perpetually seeks to escape the present: usually its point of destination is the past and the future. As Fanon states, for black people, the present is overwhelmed by the past, in a cyclical way and the only way to break this circuit is through a violent explosion. This hellish cycle hinders forward movement at the expense of freedom. Its perpetual returns and repetitions shape the contours of black existence; “the black’s cage is itself temporal”, according to Keeling (2007:35). Fanon’s opening gambit in *Black Skin, White Masks* states that the black grammar of suffering is predicated on the state of being trapped within this temporal cycle of unfreedom: “The explosion will not happen today. It is too late or too soon.” (Fanon 1967, 2008:1). The conceptual baseline of this chapter lies in the temporal crisis of black existence that Dlamini’s *Native Nostalgia* is a symptom of. With the guidance of Keeling’s (2007) *Witches Flight*, Derek Hook’s (2013) *(Post) apartheid Conditions* and Tyrone S. Palmer’s (2016) “Devouring the Flesh: Notes Towards the Analytics of Seeing”, I

set out to elaborate on how the sentimental project of nostalgia is in aid of the hellish cycle via the use of the image, an image that gratifies while mystifying the common senses of post-apartheid South Africa.

4.2 IN VISUAL TERMS

Kara Keeling (2007) discusses how the process of cinematic perception enables us to consume cinematic images. She derives the concept of the cinematic from Gilles Deleuze's (1991, 1994) theoretical work on film. In Keeling's discussion, "the cinematic" does not refer exclusively to the 'moving image', in the form of film. "The cinematic" loosely functions as a metaphorical umbrella that covers various technologies of visibility and visual culture, including fine art, advertising, the media, social media, etc. The aforementioned mediums play an important part in reinforcing the reproduction of social reality. Moreover, these technologies mediate visual text and imagery that calibrate the hegemony of "twentieth century reality". Our contemporary field of vision is saturated with an archive of "past memory images", to the extent that the 'spectacle' becomes inescapable in both the real and in the mediated world (Keeling 2007:12; Palmer 2016). We have become habituated to this flux of images; they have become images of common sense.

4.3 READING MARIKANA AND THE REITZ INCIDENT AS IMAGES OF COMMONSENSE

A film starts. A viewer creates various circuits between the present perception of the set of images that the film comprises and past memory images available to make sense of the film.

In using the conventions of film viewing, in the quote above Keeling (2007:12) deconstructs a process that brings into formation a medley of variables that work to make coherent "the image of common sense". This understanding can be effectively stretched to accommodate various visual data and visual technologies in addition to film, as it is worth noting that film is technically composed of an amalgamation of photographs that appear in rapid succession, hence the use of the

term “motion picture”. Every time we encounter a set of images, an archive of “past memory images” is automatically mentally activated, enabling us to understand the image or a set of images that are being presented in front of us. We may understand these “past memory images” as a set of clichés that belong in the family of stereotypes.

By adopting Henri Bergson’s theory of “affection”, Keeling argues that via affection and perception our bodies are habituated to perceive and recognise images (Bergson quoted in Keeling 2007:13).⁹⁰ A distinction is marked between “affection felt and image perceived”; this distinction emphasises the fact that the nature of this difference is one of degree not of kind. “Affection is within our body. Affection is the point at which one is able to perceive one’s own body. Image is outside our body, “and that is why the surface of our body, the common limit of this and other bodies, is given to us in the form both of sensations and of an image” (Bergson in Keeling 2007:13). Keeling further explains that pure perception is the aggregate of images. This means that:

Affection is the activity whereby one’s own body is adopted as the privileged image around which other images arrange themselves to their possible actions upon that body. Through affection each living image comes to define its own body from differentiating it from other images in the fact that it can be felt from within by affective sensations caused by the body’s actual effort on itself.

Affection enables us to differentiate our own body from an aggregate of images; it enables us to constitute our own body. Moreover, this vindicates the theory of the body as an archive, in other words it speaks about the body’s ability to store actions of the past in the form of “motor-contrivances”. Further, Keeling (2007:14) states that clichés provide the means of continuing movements, because they reaffirm the relationship between sensory and motor schema: this is how recognition occurs, allowing the continuation of movement. This movement incorporates the act of thinking as a kind of movement; this is a Deleuzian interpretation. In this theoretical paradigm,

⁹⁰ From Bergson’s *Matter and Memory*

clichés are understood as common memory images that are directed onto a perception prepared by the common sensory-motor schema. Keeling uses the term “common sense” to speak about a shared set of motor contrivances that affect one’s subjective perception.

This motor schema via perception triggers a set of memory images in the form of “experiences, knowledges, traditions and so on that are available to memory during perception” (Keeling 2007:14). More importantly, “common sense memory images” arrive as clichés that are purposed to reproduce present movement. Clichés can also be interpreted as outcomes of survival and adaptation. This follows from Deleuze’s idea that we have the sensory motor schemata for recognising things, for putting up with things and enduring: “We have the schemata for turning away when it is too unpleasant, for prompting resignation when it is terrible and for assimilating when it is too beautiful” (Deleuze in Keeling 2007:15). This Deleuzian interpretation leads Keeling to conclude that “As living images our senses are conditioned to accommodate oppression and exploitation, even our own” (Keeling 2007:15). The realm of visibility is political.

What is presented to us as spectators is not always the complete picture, despite the mechanisms that work to make us believe that what we are seeing is everything. In this respect, the political challenge is to expose what is deliberately hidden from view by the image. Visibility is political in a fundamental way, because any visual representation of black subjects is always faced with the perennial burden of either assimilating to the common sense of cliché-stereotypes or of consciously destroying them; to echo Deleuze, “there exists not a civilisation of the image, but a civilisation of the cliché...Cinema’s images sink to the state of cliché” (Deleuze in Keeling 2007:18). Keeling argues that within this schema, it is not enough for visual practitioners to challenge negative representation and the lack of representation (being unrepresented): the very constitution of the image as representative must also be challenged. The power of Keeling’s theoretical approach to the image lies in the fact that she does not disimbricate culture and politics: she insists that they must be thought about together (2007:21). The normative practice of treating

the image as an object of non-political value is a standard practice that serves ideological ends; reading Keeling's notion of the common sense critically sheds light on this practice. The concept of the common sense sheds light on the numerous ways that the "image participates in the struggle for hegemony involved in capitalist exploitation" (2007:21). Antonio Gramsci's (1992) *Prison Books* structures the theoretical base of this concept; it is an idea shaped by a Marxist agenda. The common sense primarily refers to a shared set of memory images that are communally transmitted between groups. There are many common senses; for instance, there are subaltern common senses, bourgeois common senses and heteronormative common senses – the list goes on.

Keeling believes that this step helps us understand better how, for instance, the black common sense is composed of elements that both acquiesce to and resist dominant ideologies. The incorporation of such compromises to domination and exploitation is understood as a survival strategy; however it also within the common senses of subaltern groups where alternatives to domination are hatched (Keeling 2007:20). The role of affect (pleasure) and capital cannot be overstated in the repeated mediation of the image of common sense. The production and reproduction of cinematic realities and processes require labour. Labour is expended in the consumption of cinematic images, inter alia in art and visual culture. In other words, the act of watching images is a form of labour that is obscured by the fact that it is often pleasurable. However, as enjoyable as it may be, it still requires the spectator to offer their time and money:

The socioeconomic and cultural dynamics of globalization must be understood not only in spatial terms that designate capital's relentless march to exploit the globe, but also in terms of its ability to reach into processes whereby one comes to be oneself and even to make violation feel good, an ability that has both spatial and temporal implications (Keeling 2007:25)

In this thesis, one of the dimensions that I seek to give clarity and critical elaboration to is the way that the image is the vehicle through which 'violation' is made to feel good: how the image facilitates pleasure in violation. The promises of pleasure and death always intermingle via black

flesh. One of the more potent characteristics of the black body is its “thingly quality”; its excessive over-availability speaks directly to what Saidiya Hartman terms as “fungibility”. Black bodies are fungible for punishment (gratuitous violence) and for the other’s pleasure and profit (Hartman 1997:20). The black body is available to be used in any way imaginable and it is a body available for use in ways not yet imagined (Wilderson 2010:100).

The indiscernible sentience of black subjects, the elusiveness of black pain, renders their ‘humanity’ suspect. When Du Bois (1903:4) raises the question pertaining to the existential crises facing blacks, “How does it feel to be a problem?”, he is raising it at the level of the ontological. It is a question of colour. To be black is to be a problem. Blackness is a problem to visibility, it can never be truly represented; blackness suggests that it is unknowable in human terms. “In the colonial world the realm of visual representation and visibility is the province of whites in which any individual black is a projection of all blacks” (Du Bois 1903:4). This is why blackness is a cliché – it is over-determined. Blacks are positioned to see and know themselves through the white imaginary, the distorted images they see and internalise lead to a psychological deformation, an epistemic violence. In the previous chapter, I outlined how Africans are visually constructed as temporal problems. This is evident in how alterity determines them as temporal others that both affirm and threaten the flow of modern time and progress. Moreover, the problem that being black presents to the visual realm is frankly articulated by Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Keeling makes an apt synthesis of Fanon’s take when she states:

According to Fanon, a colonized and civilized society marks a condition of existence in which the black’s being is precluded by his perceptible blackness because past images, stories and the like constantly overwhelm perceptions of the present. Under these circumstances, the black is a cliché; the preponderance of commonly available past colonial images of blacks (tom toms, cannibals etc.) flow easily into any present perception of a black and become indistinguishable from it. The circuit thereby created seems to be closed—there is no possibility of a conception of a future that could be different from the colonial past (Keeling 2007:33).

Therefore, under colonial duress, black temporality renders the past, present and the future as indistinguishable from one another. The past is in the present and the future is no different from the past. A different future is always out of reach because the past is always overwhelming the present, compounding a hellish cycle, a closed circuit. Past images play a major role in locking the past into the present. Prepositions such as ‘before’ and ‘after’ fail to block the excesses of colonial violence that percolates into the present, organising our present realities. One of the difficulties facing the South African national imaginary is its inability to come to terms with the fact that the structural violence of apartheid did not go away.

The struggle with coming to terms with the common sense of apartheid’s structural violence is evident in the manner that antiblack acts are habitually treated as isolated instances, as events, as words uttered by an individual: this is symptomatic of a larger disavowal. The path of disavowal leads to pleasure: I will expand on this in the next chapter. These spectacular scenes of violence are rationalised as senseless, as occurring outside of space and time. These spectacles of violence are rationalised as senseless, as occurring outside of space and time, when in fact they accumulate from everyday mundane acts that eventually explode as spectacle. It is within this post-apartheid visual matrix that I position these incidents as not as exceptional, but as necessary. I will proceed to comment on a number of images that have gripped national and international interest in the past few years as far as the spectacles of violence are concerned. The first one is the Marikana massacre, the second is the Reitz Four video. Rather than to extract Marikana out of a democratic rationale, by casting it as an aberration, my discussion will follow a line of argument frequently put forward in the works of Frank Wilderson (2010), Joy James and Christina Sharpe in relation to antiblack police violence (2012: 193):

What happens when instead of becoming enraged when a person is killed, we recognize black death as predictable and as a constitutive aspect of democracy? What will happen then when instead of demanding justice we recognize (or at least consider) that the very notion of justice ... produces and

requires black exclusion and death as normative (James and Costa Vargas 2012: 193).

Following on James and Costa Vargas's line of thought, begs the question of what happens when we start to think of the Marikana massacre as a necessary act and less as a senseless and irrational occurrence. What happens when we think of the Marikana episode as composition of generative mechanisms that offer psychic integration? Occurring seventeen years after the dawn of democracy, in 2012, the Marikana massacre is considered the most conspicuous event of police brutality since the end of apartheid. The Marikana episode triggered memories of the violence suffered under the apartheid police.

In her article "The Marikana Massacre: Seeing it all", the art historian Amanda Du Preez suggests that comparisons have been drawn between the Marikana massacre and the Sharpeville massacre that happened on the 21st of March in 1960. In Sharpeville, 69 people were gunned down, and more than 300 black people were wounded by the police while protesting against apartheid passbook policies (Du Preez 2015:1). The atrocity in Sharpeville has come to symbolise the height of apartheid, particularly because of the state of emergency that was declared by the ruling apartheid government and the banning of the ANC that followed. However, this chapter follows the idea that black people in South Africa, in a general sense continue to live in a state of emergency in spite of democracy. This is why I avoid reading the scene of Marikana as an anomaly or as exceptional. Rather, I would frame the Marikana massacre as a scene that represents an accumulation of an everyday abjection that characterises the condition of blacks in the post-apartheid context. In fact, what I suggest in this paper through the use of the term "common sense", is that these events remind us of continuous unfreedom that renders the historical shift between apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa illegible.

On the 16th of August 2012, 300 rounds of live ammunition were fired at striking mineworkers by the police using automatic weapons in a military style operation (Hattingh 2012).

Thirty-six black mineworkers at the Lonmin⁹¹ mines were killed, 100 were shot, 78 were wounded and more than 250 were arrested. The miners of Lonmin were demanding a living wage⁹² of R12 500 which at the time was equivalent to US\$500. Lonmin is a British company that mines platinum in the mining town of Marikana in South Africa. Lonmin has its beginnings in Britain's imperial presence in South Africa, which in turn established an exploitative and destructive labour structure. Within this labour structure black workers provided the necessary cheap labour for the accumulation of gold at whatever cost. According to Morley Nkosi (2012), in his book *Mining Deep: The Origins of the Labour Structure in South Africa*, this oppressive labour structure in the mines "had to be retained, maintained and buttressed, in the interest of the world's financial system in which the city of London was the centre" (2012: 296). Aside from a few black people in boardrooms, the mining industry and its labour relations were left intact after the official ending of apartheid (Buitendag and Coetzer 2015). Thus, what happened in Marikana should not be interpreted as a turning point, rather the brutality of Marikana occurs precisely because of the incomplete nature of the freedom and emancipation glibly promised to blacks by a 'new' dispensation⁹³, with the advent of democracy.

What is of paramount importance in this argument is how the trauma of somatic brutality is visually reproduced by media reportage and representation. By framing the victims of the Marikana massacre through colonial tropes, visual media not only justifies the violence that targets the post-apartheid black body, but more imperatively, it is a vindication of the aesthetics of colonial tropes⁹⁴ and their continued viability. No one was held directly responsible for the massacre, it was said that the "police were doing their jobs" in a statement issued by the president, Jacob Zuma. What

⁹¹ Lonmin is a mining company that has its headquarters in London, UK

⁹² The demand of R12,500 was more than twice the average mineworkers' salary when Lonmin workers in the town of Marikana first went on strike on 9 August 2012.

⁹³ Many questioned how it could be that the brutality of massacre proportions could happen in a democratic post-apartheid South Africa, decades after the demise of apartheid. In similar tones, across the Atlantic many ask how could violence perpetrated by the police on black men continue under a black presidency.

⁹⁴ See Gillian Schutte's (2015) "Colonial Tropes and the Media Reportage of Marikana Massacre"

is of interest in this paper is the coherent manner in which various state apparatuses, namely the media, the police and the presidency in unison shifted the blame to the miners both dead and alive.

Following the infamous beating of Rodney King in 1991, Sharpe (2012) writes that, “the aggrieved is not acknowledged to be aggrieved; the aggrieved is staged as the aggressor (Sharpe 2012:828). After the police had arrived on site to deal with the striking miners there was a palpable sense of relief and reassurance. Leading up to the massacre, its imaging on mainstream media was compelling. An unsympathetic mood had been created through the evocation of phobogenic tropes that were activated in the media apparatus through a careful selection of footage used in the mainstream media to report on the strike. A close-up shot of a black man with his tongue out, licking the blade of a spear, was repeated ad nauseam in online and print media. The incessant repetition of this image can be connected to a longstanding colonial myth on the hyper-masculinity and savagery of black men.

This image was chosen amongst a vast array, arguably because it taps into a powerful myth that remains intact in the collective psychic imagination of white South Africa (Schutte 2015: 7). It is a “traditional” spear and the animalistic licking that represents the “savage” desire for bloodshed which suggests black men are immune to and this ultimately rationalises their injury and death. While the man in the figure desires bloodshed, he cannot bleed, a paradox that requires his elimination. Further his tongue does not speak, but licks, rejecting human communication in favour of bestial/slave antics.

The visual tradition of depicting natives as irrational, savage brutes echoes the early work of the explorer-painter George French Angas in his famous *Kafirs Illustrated* (1849), a set of lithographs that contributed to the creation of colonial knowledge systems. This image, in an uncanny way, also resembles the Battle of Blood River⁹⁵ marble frieze at the Voortrekker

⁹⁵ The Battle of Blood River is the name given to the battle that took place close to the Ncome river in KwaZulu-Natal on December 16, 1838. It marks the defeat of the Zulu army against the Boers who are the descendants of Dutch settlers (Duminy and Guest 1989:122).

monument⁹⁶ in Pretoria. The frieze is infamous for its denigrating depiction of the Zulu army as ruthless, savage brutes throwing spears; they are portrayed in stark contrast to the sanctifying depiction of the Afrikaners, the descendants of Dutch settlers whose presence is portrayed as a noble and civilising force.

The image of the black miner licking his spear evokes a powerful myth that remains intact in the collective psychic imagination of white South Africa (Schutte 2015: 7). The savage black man trope follows a Fanonian script of phobogenesis: a structure of feeling which positions the black subject as something threatening, to be feared and as a result needs to be contained. The often nameless dangerous black intruder that grips the collective psyche of South Africa is given



Figure 4. Alon Skuy, *Marikana Massacre*. 2013

⁹⁶ “Voortrekker” is an Afrikaans term for the Boer pioneers who left the Cape Colony and went into the hinterland of South Africa in the 1830s. A monument in honor of Afrikaner history was built and inaugurated on December 16, 1939. Inside the monument, there is a marble frieze that depicts the grand narrative of Boer heroism. More generally, as discussed by Annie Coombes (2003, 28), the Voortrekker Monument embodies the foundational myths of Afrikaner nationalism, such as Afrikaners’ divine proprietary rights to South Africa.

a particular face in this image. The photograph in Figure 4 is part of a picture story that won its photographer Alon Skuy the Picture Of The Year International (POYI) award in San Diego in 2012 and it raked in plenty of awards in South Africa also. Through a set of images like Figure 4 visual media implicitly organised public consciousness, tapping into a colonial tradition of visibility and aesthetics that can be traced back to the tradition of colonial paintings. These images participate not only to frame the black miners as violent agitators but they suggest that capital is being assaulted. Because capital is precarious, state intervention becomes necessary and justified to deal with the threat.

Visual media implicitly organised public consciousness, tapping into a colonial tradition of visibility and aesthetics that emanate that can be traced back to old days of the *swart gevaar*⁹⁷. The police could only have been doing their jobs. Sharpe fittingly locates police brutality within the processes of visual history

Terror has a history, at least one branch of that history is constituted through the ocular and aural spectacle of violence against black flesh that is positioned by the gaze and the law as deviant and in need of disciplining. (Sharpe 2009:829)

The black body in a state of destruction is one of the most enduringly iconised and feted tropes in the photography industry in South Africa. As Hook suggests, it seems revealing that images depicting black bodies in states of imminent and/or horrific death receive worldwide acclaim and press circulation (Hook 2014:49). For instance, the illustrious trajectory of the film *The Bang Bang Club* is established on an iconography of suffering that centres on the immolation, mutilation and starvation of black bodies. Two photographers from the group were awarded Pulitzer Prizes for their photographs, Kevin Carter for his frame of an emaciated Sudanese child being stalked by a

⁹⁷ *Swart gevaar* is an Afrikaans term that means black danger. This term was used mainly during apartheid as a response to a perceived black brutality against whites (Davidson 2017).

culture and Greg Marinovich for shooting a series of images that depict a man, Lindsay Tshabalala, being stabbed and burnt alive. It would be myopic to attribute and confine the appeal of these images to apartheid culture. Their widespread veneration vindicates that apartheid, as Biko said, represents a microcosm of a larger global antiblack/negrophobic/Afrophobic structure of representation. Images coded with black death and black pain have a global appeal, they warrant acclaim. Hook (2014:49) notes that the same is not applicable for white bodies. “The white body is inviolable”, states Ndebele “and that inviolability is in direct proportion to the violability of the black body” (Ndebele 2009:17). Sontag echoes this sentiment in *Regarding the Pain of Others* when she says that white bodies are accorded the dignity that is not given to others:

The more remote or exotic the place, the more likely we are to have full frontal views of the dead and dying, thus postcolonial Africa exists in the consciousness of the general public in the rich world – besides through its sexy music – mainly as a succession of large eyed victims, starting with figures in the famine lands of Biafra in the late 1960s to the survivors of genocide of nearly a million Rwandan Tutsis in 1994 and, a few years later, the children and adults whose limbs were hacked off during a program of mass terror ... more recently the photographs are of whole families of indigent villagers dying of AIDS. (Sontag 2003:63)

Close-up shots of mutilated flesh, dismembered limbs and “large eyed” emaciated children echo a Conradian⁹⁸ narrative (Sontag 2003:64). They affirm a view that Western spectators already subconsciously hold and desire about Africa, that Africa is a place of disaster and catastrophe. In the words of Sontag:

The ubiquity of those photographs and those horrors cannot help but nourish belief in the inevitability of tragedy in the benighted or backward – that is, poor – parts of the world. (Sontag 2003:64).

⁹⁸ This is in reference to Joseph Conrad's polemic *The Heart of Darkness*.

Sontag appropriately connects these forms of display to the dehumanising senses of ethnological exhibitions (of Africans); the tradition of human zoos in European capitals which took place between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries⁹⁹. I am more interested in the “nourishing” nature of these spectacles of death that Sontag alludes to. Wilderson (2016:79) brings a persuasive argument on this ‘nourishing’ function of black death: he claims that “The spectacle of black death is essential to the mental health of the world, we can’t be wiped out completely, our deaths must be repeated visually”. To read the violent phobogenesis of the black body, and its concomitant visual repetitions, as normative and necessary enables us to understand the cycle of unfreedom that predetermines black subjectivity even in the post-apartheid arrangement.

Its visibility and visual representation can be argued to be a framework from where black subjectivity is locked into a hellish cycle of phobogenesis. It is worth noting that, in the subsequent media analysis of the Marikana massacre, the past event of the Sharpeville massacre was conjured in order to give clarity to the unfolding of Marikana. In a metaphorical and material way, the connections between Sharpeville and Marikana massacres that can be drawn, cannot be dismissed; both events are based on the violence unleashed on black bodies, which was sanctioned by the state (by extension the law). The violence seamlessly continues from the real into the representational realm, and in this way the violence is doubled and replayed (as the black imago), as noted by Poloko Tau (in Derek Hook 2012:58), who observes the *mise en scène* of destroyed bodies in the economy of images:

Image after image was beamed onto screens showing ... sets of a crime scene photos and images taken in the aftermath of the August 16 Marikana massacre ... Some images show bullet riddled bodies ... others revealed dead miners with their hands cuffed.

A set of colonial clichés was conjured in order to not only render the unfolding of the event as common sense, but to further affirm that the scale of violence meted out against the black miners

⁹⁹ I will touch more on this aspect in chapter five.

was appropriate. Colonial-apartheid fantasy has always normalised black abjection, black poverty and the destruction of black flesh. The structural fixation with the phobogenic imago and its repetition via various forms media and popular culture can thus be understood as a symbolic extension of the gratuitous violence that structures abjection. Scenes of black abjection do more than alleviate white anxiety, moreover, in the public psyche black objecthood renders blackness as “property of enjoyment” (Wilderson 2010:89).

To see the black body function as property of enjoyment is not limited to the realm of the spectacle and the public. This scene also operates in the everyday, in banal form, which makes it a bit more inarticulable, because of its mundane uneventfulness. In his novel, *Double Negative*, the South African novelist Ivan Vladislavic effectively captures the subtlety of evil banalities that structure everyday life in South Africa, when a white male character, Jaco Els reminisces nostalgically about his upbringing during apartheid:

His dearest childhood memories were of the practical jokes he had played on the servants. Stringing ropes to trip them up, setting off firecrackers under their beds, unscrewing the seat on the long drop. You could imagine he found his vocation in the process. His work which involved jailing people for petty offences was a malevolent prank. The way he spoke about it, forced removals, detention without trial, the troops in the townships were all larger examples of the same mischief (2011:18).

The white character, Jaco Els, is able to seamlessly develop this childhood pastime, (of humiliating black servants) into a public institutional repertoire by way of ‘forced removals’ and ‘jailing people’. This institutional repertoire speaks to the idea of how the law and legislation shroud white fantasy. The writer Vladislavic in effect impeccably depicts the quotidian manner in which black bodies are rendered fungible, in other words he depicts the ways in which they are available for use in white fun and play. An incident of parallel proportions unfolded in real life at the beginning

of 2007. A group of white students at the University of the Free State¹⁰⁰ recorded themselves on video enacting a series of initiation activities. In the video, the black cleaners are instructed by the white students to kneel down, eat the food laced in urine, and participate in activities such as dancing, drinking, sprinting and playing rugby. A 10-minute video of the incident later emerged online and circulated on the internet, Figure 4.1 is a screenshot of the video.



Figure 4.1. The Reitz Four video showing student urinating on food, 2009 (screenshot by author)

What is notable, as Crain Soudein (2010:9) observes, is how in the video this incident is presented as a jolly “light-hearted affair”:

It is interesting to note the sense of fun everybody has in making the video. The young men laugh often as the workers struggle to drink, eat the food and run the race. The workers themselves laugh often and freely.

¹⁰⁰ The University of the Free State is located in the province of the Free State in South Africa. The Free State, also once called the Orange Free State (OFS), was one of the first four provinces of the old South Africa, established in 1854. Some of the Voortrekkers, who are the descendants of the Dutch settlers moved away from the Cape Colony, settled north of the Orange River and established the Free State (Giliomee and Mbenga 2007:151).

In the aforementioned quote, Soudien suggests that the black cleaners who are the butt of the joke, from the video seem to be having fun as the white students pull the prank on them. A show is put on and staged for white scopical pleasure (Marriott 2000). The pleasure is precisely lodged in the appearance of black servants being seen to enjoy their own humiliation and this is significant. The sight of blacks “laughing openly and freely” after having eaten a stew of abject ingredients has utility as far as it functions towards the psychic nourishment of non-black subjects. It is a grin manufactured precisely for white appeasement and enjoyment (Wilderson 2010:115). Bernard Wolfe, quoted by Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*¹⁰¹ notes that “It pleases us to portray the negro showing us all his teeth in a smile made for us, and his smile as we see it-as we make it-always means a gift”.

¹⁰¹ Please note that Frantz Fanon is quoting Bernard Wolfe here.



Figure 4.2. The Reitz Four video showing student giving urinated food to kneeling UFS staff, 2009 (screenshot by author)

After the workers have eaten the urine-laced concoction, as seen in Figure 4.2, we see them vomit the undigested contents into the buckets positioned in front of them, and the abrupt vomiting is punctuated by bursts of audible laughter. This uneasy laughter interestingly evokes Susan Gubar's apt discussion of the blackface performer's countenance, she points out that the grin of the blackface performer in fact masks a grimace of pain; it is a grin that functions to placate white guilt. A grin, a grimace or both, the two occur simultaneously (Gubar 1997:82). The black workers experience themselves duplicated and split in half by the gaze of the camera, bringing to mind the ambiguous function of the mask in discussed in Mbembe's 'A Well of Fantasies'. His analysis is worth quoting at length:

One of the functions of the mask, as we know, is to hide the face by doubling it. The mask is the power of the double, the crossing of being with appearance. However, the person wearing the mask can also see others without being seen, and see the underneath of things, like a hidden shadow. But if being

and appearance combine in the mask, it is true as well that, because of the impossibility of seeing the face hidden by the mask, of peering through the minuscule gap, the mask always denounces itself as a mask (2017:51).

The “*squeezas*”¹⁰² “laugh openly” whilst involuntarily heaving, showing signs of nausea and displeasure. “Look at how happy those darkies are; they are not forcibly owned but they give themselves freely as a gift to their masters!”¹⁰³. The image of black workers on their knees, laughing after consuming excremental matter, consolidates much more than the “happy darkie” stereotype, but rather it submits to the idea of the black body as a faecal object. To this point, David Marriott (2017), discusses a piece of graffiti he came across as a child in a British bathroom: “What’s the difference between a nigger and a bucket of shit? The bucket.”¹⁰⁴ The enjoyment of the scene is not confined to the screen; it is an enjoyment that proceeds off and on screen. The students create the film with the prospect that a viewership will relish in it. It is worth mentioning that after the video was leaked to the internet, there was a national outcry that led to the students being charged with *crimen injuria*. The Free State University later dropped the charges as an effort to promote forgiveness and racial integration in the university. This gesture was directed by its newly elected rector Jonathan Jansen¹⁰⁵, who has regularly fashioned his leadership as a

¹⁰² In the video, the term “*squeeza*” is used by the students to refer to the female workers. *Squeeza* is a Fanagalo word (language that developed in the minefields of South Africa) meaning sister-in-law. But it can be used as a loose term to refer to a female friend or acquaintance.

¹⁰³ Susan Gubar quotes Mark Twain here (1997:82).

¹⁰⁴ It is worth noting that the use of human excrement in protests has become increasingly salient in recent years in South Africa. In 2015, protesters from the Ses’khona People’s Rights Movement emptied buckets full of faeces at the entrance of Cape Town International Airport as a method of bringing attention to the fact that there are virtually no adequate sanitation facilities in certain areas of Cape Town, specifically designated black areas such as Khayelitsha, where the bucket system remains intact. Notably the Rhodes Must Fall protests which later morphed into Fees Must Fall, were initiated by the single act of a black student, Chumani Maxwele throwing a bucket of faeces on the statue of Cecil John Rhodes.

¹⁰⁵ In his inaugural address in 2009, the newly appointed Rector of the University of the Free State, Professor Jonathan Jansen made the following statement about the Reitz incident:

“I also feel compelled to say this to you tonight. Those four students who committed that heinous act, are my students. If I may borrow from another leader, I cannot deny them, any more than I cannot deny my own children. The four Reitz students are children of this country, they are youth of the province, and they are students of our university. They are, I repeat, my students.

And so I have made some decisions.

1. 1. In a gesture of racial reconciliation, and the need for healing, the University of the Free State will withdraw its own charges against the four students. The University will therefore not pursue any further action against the four young men implicated in the Reitz incident. In this spirit of *toenadering*, the University will go further, and invite those four students to continue their studies here.

2. In recognition of our institutional complicity in the Reitz saga, and the need for social justice, the University of the Free State will not only pursue forgiveness but will also pay reparations to the workers concerned for damages to their dignity and their self-esteem.”

<http://www.muthalaidoo.co.za/articles-and-papers-othersmenu-86/196-jonathan-jansen-and-the-reitz-incident> accessed on 15 April 2017

continuation of Nelson Mandela's legacy. Again the manner in which this issue was handled recycles an earlier event; the aftermath of the Reitz Four debacle represents a microcosmic echoing of a much larger national moment, the forgive and forget narrative that characterises the post-1994 moment and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). This is further demonstrated by the two day reconciliation ceremony that was hosted by the University of the Free State in which the four students offered a public apology to the workers (Taylor 2014:15). This act was commended by Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, who served as chairperson of the TRC in 1996. In response to the restaging of the Truth and Reconciliation event at the university, Tutu said Jansen had "done us proud"¹⁰⁶.

The reiteration of the TRC as a restorative measure at the university, harks back to the national ideology of post-racial futurity that South Africa (as led by the presidency of Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu) had attempted to carve out in the form of rainbowism. However we must consider this ideology against the unrelenting occurrence of these phobogenic scenes (the contents of apartheid), such as Marikana and the Reitz Four, which are by no means isolated events. A group of elderly black *workers* were used for purposes that lie *beyond the scope of their work*, in other words they were rendered, to be toyed with for the fun of young white students. We may consider these young students as second-generation post-apartheid citizens¹⁰⁷, who as a result can be interpreted as detached from the scenes of apartheid because they would have experienced apartheid as young children. However, on the contrary their delivery is continuous with apartheid's common sense even in the post-apartheid present, rendering the temporal gap between apartheid and post-apartheid ambiguous.

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Punish-then-forgive-Reitz-4-20091021>

¹⁰⁷ Jessica Taylor (2015) mentions in her thesis *A Qualitative Exploration of the Reitz Reconciliation Process as an Exercise of in Restorative Justice*. This thesis was published by the University of the Free State

The medium of the moving image in the form of film continues to take centre focus as I now turn to the immediate post-1994 moment, which is the subject of a video artwork by the artist Bogosi Sekhukhuni. In Sekhukhuni's video vignette mash up *Dream Diaries* there is a similar scene, where poor people are pranked into eating a bitter tasting "Rainbow yoghurt for the nation" and having to sell the yoghurt for a fake advertisement in a Leon Schuster¹⁰⁸ skit that Sekhukhuni layers in his video piece.

4.4 STAGING THE FUTURE: POST-APARTHEID NOSTALGIA IN BOGOSI SEKHUKHUNI'S *DREAM DIARIES*

Bogosi Sekhukhuni is a young South African multimedia artist who can be categorised as belonging to the born-free generation, considering that he was born in 1991, during South Africa's transition into a democratic state. His *Dream Diaries* video series was part of a larger exhibition called *Rainbowcore* that took place in 2014 at Whatiftheworld Gallery. *Dream Diaries* is pertinent to my discussion as I argue it poses a direct critique of the rainbowism myth underpinned by a restorative and prospective nostalgia that desires a non-racial and post-racial South Africa. As Kenneth Tafira (2016:1) argues in his paper "The Nation in the Post-apartheid Era", in the early nineties, "under the ethos of rainbowism, race and racism recede to the background, become chameleonic and subterranean". For South Africa, 1994 characterises an instance of a state-sanctioned collectivised prospective nostalgia, as the state strained to anchor the ideology of non-racialism. Tafira (2016: 1) states that during this time:

[o]ne detects a synonymy with post-apartheid's brand of multiculturalism which goes by the name of the rainbow nation or non-racialism. During the Mandela era (1994–1999) a new vocabulary emerged to describe a new social order, that is, nationhood, unity, racial harmony and race entered a delicate and sensitive terrain

¹⁰⁸ Leon Schuster is a famous South African filmmaker, actor, comedian and screen writer. He is arguably one of the most successful filmmakers in South Africa considering the popularity of his films in the box office. Interestingly, Leon Schuster regularly performs in blackface, for instance in his movies such as *Mama Jack* (2005).

The affective currents in post-apartheid visual practice attest to the push towards this rainbowist brand of a prospective nostalgia. Saks in (Slade 2015:41) argues that the effects of the ideology of rainbowism can be seen in South Africa's state-sanctioned mediascape through the types of films and movies that the National Film & Video Foundation was funding:

For instance, during the first decade of the new South Africa, there was a widespread inability or unwillingness on the part of the state-subsidised films to critique the state or address ongoing white racism and black rage as conditions of society and subjectivity (Saks in Slade 2015:41).

The first democratic elections in 1994 officially launched South Africa into a post-apartheid realm. Post-apartheid discourse arguably emanates from this singular event as a marker of progress, as it ushers in the promise of a new era. In *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym (2001:iv) observes that “nostalgia is not always about the past; it can also be prospective. Fantasies of the past, determined by the needs of the present, have a direct impact on the realities of the future.”

The transition from apartheid to democracy required South Africa to imagine itself anew¹⁰⁹ into a present with a prospective nostalgic inflection. The ideology of rainbowism and its blazing spirit of reconciliation banished the mention of race from the political vocabulary (Nkosi 2016:151). Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela collaborated in the popularising of South Africa's brand new trademark: the “Rainbow Nation”. Nelson Mandela enters as the master-signifier for

¹⁰⁹ The legislated demise of apartheid and the post-TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission) reconciliation project led by the ANC state was designed to legitimise what was perceived as a definitive break with the apartheid colonial past. This process was achieved in the absence of retributive justice, and that is why it remains pivotal to take cognisance of the fact that these efforts did not wholly dismantle the systemic structure of racial capitalism and its global resonance: the common sense of the past continues into the present. Following closely on Biko's analysis, apartheid becomes a microcosm of a global racial capitalism (Biko 1978:72). In *(Post) Apartheid Conditions*, Derek Hook (2014) supports that “Apartheid represents a particularly brutal instantiation of a racist power structure that can be felt elsewhere in the world (2014:87). Therefore, it is crucial we stay mindful of the slippery tendency in postcolonial studies which posit the ‘post’ affix as a temporal signifier of the ‘before and after’ of colonialism. This slippery practice has the p
enchant “of obscuring how colonialism's violences, excesses, logics, economies and common senses continue to inform and affect in fundamental ways existing organisations of life and activities of living” Keeling (2007:10). Within the political context of fast acceleration towards change and transition, a perceived fast-changing present was acutely registered in the psycho-social imaginary; this, according to Boym (2001:xvi), sets in motion the eruption of nostalgia. “Outbreaks of nostalgia usually often follow revolutions” (e.g. The French Revolution, the Russian Revolution, and the end of the Soviet Union), and within the context of this thesis I speak primarily from the legislated end of apartheid as represented by the first democratic elections in 1994. In my analysis, the focus is on the temporal transition from apartheid to post-apartheid in visual terms. I aim to elaborate on the visual sensibilities undergirding the apartheid past; put differently, I am referring to the colonial apartheid images of common sense that are recurrently brought into the present (Hook 2014:191).

this spellbinding period that gave birth to the “miracle nation”. Giliomee and Mbenga expand on this (2007:412):

He showed no sign of bitterness over the more than 27 years he had spent in jail. Mandela captivated the whites; he cast a spell that produced a state of ‘charismatic bewilderment’, as one commentator described it. The culmination was his appearance at the final of the Rugby World Cup tournament in 1995.

Mandela captured the hearts of white South Africa by exhibiting effervescent *jouissance* – not bitterness – after serving close to 30 years in jail. Bogosi Sekhununi’s video draws from this key appearance at the 1995 Rugby World Cup tournament hosted by South Africa. In the video, we see scenes of Nelson Mandela arriving at Ellis Park Stadium, wearing a Springbok rugby jersey and shaking hands with Francois Pienaar, the captain of the national rugby team. This image became a spectacle of blockbuster proportions, reproduced by the Hollywood machine in the form of the film, *Invictus* (2009). The orgiastic elation of the “new” South Africa was palpable through the boundless circulation of this image, as though South Africa had stumbled into a dream, as Bogosi Sekhukhuni suggests in his artwork *Dream Diaries*.

The psychic hold of the rainbowism ideology has at least, on two occasions played out at the realm of Rugby World tournaments, first in 1995 as previously mentioned and then again recently in 2019, when South Africa won the championship. On a national scale, there has been a post-1994 synergy between rugby and rainbow nationalism and this is pointed out in Sisonke Msimang’s (2019) essay “Of Rugby’s and Rainbows”. Following South Africa winning the Rugby World Cup, Msimang writes an article arguing that the idea of the Rainbow Nation centers the experiences and feelings of white people, in other words it centers the white ego-ideal. In Msimang’s words, “this – more than anything else – makes it a hard concept (Rainbowism) to reuse in this millennium, given all we know about white supremacy and late capitalism”, (Msimang 2019). Despite this critical observation by Msimang, the rehashing of the Rainbowist

sentiment gets reiterated as a default position, such as in Adriaan Basson's (2019) piece, "The rainbow nation reloaded – let's not mess it up again" that Msimang writes a rebuttal to.

In his *Dream Diary* series, Sekhukhuni sets out to deconstruct the rainbow nationalism mythology that in turn shapes the state-sanctioned mediascapes of the "new" post-1994 South Africa, most of it sourced from the SABC archive, during the early and mid-nineties. In *Dream 1*, the viewer is initially presented with footage from the 1995 Rugby World Cup. Mandela looks on, as the Springbok team sing the "Die Stem" verse inserted into the "new" national anthem. The white and male rugby team is starkly contrasted by the black female choir who are all dressed in the new national flag. The footage is slowed down, giving an eerie distortion to the voices (Nsele and Coetzee 2013). The slowed-down rhythm of the sequence achieves a dreamlike, uncanny effect. The sound further distorts and the scene abruptly changes to footage taken from Leon Schuster's film *The Millennium Menace* (1999). Figure 4.3 below, is a still from one of the candid camera skits.



Figure 4.3. Bogosi Sekhukhuni, *Dream Diary 1* Video, 2014, (screenshot by author)

The skit that Sekhukhuni appropriates involves a fake television advertisement audition set up for a “Rainbow Yoghurt”. Participants are required to read an Afrikaans script, which translates as “Rainbow Yoghurt, for the nation. Man this is a pure pleasure purchase! Wait a moment, hmmmmm! This tastes like an angel landed on my tongue.” The irony is that the participants are unaware that it is a fake audition and that the Rainbow Yoghurt is intentionally sour (Nsele and Coetzee 2013). Thus, the participants attempt to mask their discomfort at the bitter taste whilst grinning in order to sell the yoghurt; in other words, they are compelled to enjoy the bitterness of the yoghurt, a sadomasochistic gesture.

This recalls the similar gesture performed by the black workers in the Reitz Four video who are also compelled to mask a bitter taste and instead plaster on a conciliatory smile. The underlying discomfort of the participants forms the punch line of the joke for Schuster’s audience. It is precisely their humiliation that spectators are aligned to enjoy. Sekhukhuni effectively echoes how, for the black poor, a new South Africa never really materialises, yet they are compelled to erase and sanitise their discomfort and rage. More acutely, this video comments on the sadomasochism that punctuates everyday life in post-apartheid South Africa. The footage is increasingly slowed down, in the same manner as the opening sequence. In this way, the attempts at concealing discomfort are emphasised through the distorted facial expressions of the participants and the unnaturally deep sound of their voices, and give it a chilling, nightmarish effect. In this dream sequence we see a colonial apartheid throwback of the happy native stereotype.

There is an evident power relation at play between the film-maker Leon Schuster and the availability of black bodies for humiliation as they collaborate in the spectacle. Needless to say that blacks arrive at the scene as a priori laughable objects; their vulnerability to humour and ridicule does not really require them to do anything, just like their perpetual vulnerability to

violence. This is further emphasised in the continuation of the Sun City¹¹⁰ imagery that Sekhukhuni layers on to the scene; it starts to exude from the participants' clothes and eyes, demonstrating the synthetic materiality and the promise of entering into capital as a driving force behind their actions. This scene visually echoes Kara Keeling's reminder (2008:246) that the production of blackness is intertwined with the processes of commodification and cannot be isolated from these processes. Schuster's black actors are coerced participants; bringing to mind Athi Joja's (2014:87) essay in response to Brett Bailey's restaging of human zoos "they [the black participants] are caught between the humiliating power of hunger and economic exclusion".

Figure 4.4, from *Dream Diary 2*, begins with the crowning of an elated Miss South Africa 1994; a transition is made to an old advertisement of SABC's (the South African Broadcasting Corporation) *Simunye*¹¹¹ continuity presenters dancing the samba at a glitzy party. The dreary image of Nkosi Johnson is then layered over the glossy celebratory party scene (Figure 4.4). Nkosi Johnson was a young boy who became an HIV/Aids activist before dying of the disease at the age of twelve. The signifier of Nkosi Johnson's image conjures the subsequent ominous period of HIV/Aids denialism¹¹² that peaked alongside the launch of President Mbeki's glorious vision of Africa's renewal via the "African Renaissance"¹¹³. The layering of the two images, one of

¹¹⁰ In the article, "Inscribing Exoticism at the Lost City", Jeanne van Eeden (2001), uses Sun city and the Lost city resort as a case study to argue how nostalgia can be linked to a capitalist mode of production and consumption that drives the tourist industry and theme park entertainment industries, of which Sun city is a product of (2001: 62).

Created by the hotel tycoon Sol Kerzner, Sun City opened in 1979 as South African version of Las Vegas. In 1992 he created the Lost city theme park as an extension of the USA Disney model. Van Eeden argues that the Lost city embodies a simulacrum of a domesticated otherness and a exoticism that extends from the "hallucinatory lost city of the colonial imagination". The selling point of the Lost city is built on the fantasy of it as a lost paradise, a kingdom of pleasure, an exotic getaway paradise amidst the wild tropical Africa forest. Furthermore, it is noteworthy to mention that many of the Miss South Africa contests were hosted at Sun city hence the imagery used by the Sekhukhuni. In effect Sun city and Lost city became the site for where the national social myth of rainbowism was also staged and sold to the public.

¹¹¹ *Simunye* is an isiZulu term that translates to 'we are one' in the English language. The term, *Simunye* was adopted by the SABC 1 channel in the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) as its brand and slogan in 1996, two years after South Africa's first democratic elections. Following the post-racial and reconciliation ideology of the time, through the adoption of this slogan the channel rooted and established itself as a representing new South African values and desires for unity in diversity.

¹¹² HIV/AIDS denialism is a term widely used by the media to describe former president Thabo Mbeki's antipathy towards western conventional science on HIV/AIDS. The common stance in aids denialism purports that 'AIDS deaths' are simply deaths from other diseases that have been relabelled as AIDS deaths. As a result, HIV/AIDS sufferers had limited access to nevirapine and anti-retroviral drugs, which in turn led to activism around the issue as represented by the image of Nkosi Johnson. https://www.sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/nattrass_hivaids_policy.pdf accessed on 17 July 2018.

¹¹³ The African Renaissance is memorable though the I am an African speech a rhetorical touchstone of the Thabo Mbeki presidency in 1999 (Farred in Magubane 2003:64). According to Grant Farred (2003) in his essay *The Repressions of the Modernist Unconscious: A Critique of the "African Renaissance"*, he argues that Mbeki's African

horrific calamity and the other of pleasure, is a visceral commentary on the shameful suffering black body that at once is a killjoy that haunts the post-apartheid rainbow jamboree whilst also feeding a familiar voyeuristic antiblack poverty porn gaze that was suddenly cast on people who were dying of AIDS. Although this remains a developing story it is interesting to note that in a documentary *Cold Case Hammar skjöld* that premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 2019 there is a confession made by an apartheid-era intelligence officer and ex-mercenary that HIV was deliberately spread by SAIMR¹¹⁴ at a systemic level in the Southern African region in order to wipe out black Africans¹¹⁵.



Figure 4.4. Bogosi Sekhukhuni, *Dream Diaries 2*, 2014 (screenshot by author)

Renaissance had a pan-Africanist outlook that recalled the transcending ethos of Langston Hughes (1974) *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*. Overall Mbeki's vision in the African Renaissance was to undermine the stigma of shame and suffering that underpins the way the world views the African continent.

¹¹⁴ South African Institute of Maritime Research

¹¹⁵ <https://newafricanmagazine.com/cover-story-longread/we-deliberately-spread-hiv-aids-in-south-africa-former-apartheid-era-intelligence-service-officer-confesses/>.

Accessed on 21 April 2019

In Sekhukhuni's video mashup, the party goes on as Johnson speaks into his microphone. Nkosi Johnson is then replaced by a laughing Mandela, whose inflated head is uncannily doubled through a mirror image reflection. Mandela laughs, whilst the party continues. Mandela's infectious laughter exudes the 'feel-good' magical powers of a fetish object. Mandela's magic cleanses the stain of apartheid and puts a balm over its festering wounds (Hook 2014:181). To quote Sontag (2003:103), "To make peace is to forget. To reconcile, it is necessary that memory be faulty and limited". The cheerful forgiving figure of Mandela functions as a reliable nostalgic trope for forgetting an embittering past. This is illustrated in the double-edged manner in which his image is used to domesticate the looming threat of black pain and rage that had accumulated from the past into the present.

Bogosi Sekhukhuni's *Dream Diaries* present a timely critique of a dogmatic futuristic post-apartheid nostalgia embedded in South Africa's national narrative. I use the term dogmatic to highlight its blinkered vision that refused to acknowledge the ongoing conditions of black abjection reproduced during democracy. The ideology of rainbowism and its Afrocentric relative "The African Renaissance" have arguable similarities; aesthetically they are underpinned by a subtext of hope, transcendence and overcoming amidst glaring poverty and abjection. What emerges in the imagery that accompanies these ideologies are sadomasochistic spectacles as seen in the archival artwork of Bogosi Sekhukhuni.

CHAPTER FIVE SUFFERING AND SMILING: ANTIBLACK REGIMES OF LOOKING

Suffer, suffer for world

(Fela Kuti, *Shuffering and Shmiling*, 1977)

There is a quest for the Negro, the Negro is in demand, one cannot get along without him, he is needed but only if he is made palatable in a certain way.

(Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 1952)

Art becomes violation, it arrests the Black corpse in the history of its violation ... the artistic re-enactment of that history is merely a new avant-garde cruelty and perhaps even fantasy of a murderous violence of its own

(David Marriott, *The Perfect Beauty of Black Death*, 2017)

I am a vampire, the blood I drink is Black suffering, and Black suffering brings me back to life

(Aryan Kaganof, *New Frank Talk*, 2010)

Although this chapter may not be explicitly linked to nostalgia as a concept, it contingently addresses the antiblack forms of enjoyment that the affective structure of nostalgia recalls in the form of colonial visual tropes in the visual scape of contemporary art. I focus on the art film *Enjoy Poverty III* made by the Dutch artist Renzo Martens in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and on Ayana V. Jackson's *Poverty Pornography* series. This chapter is a theoretical meditation on the various regimes of antiblack looking and spectatorship. Through selected examples of visual culture in Africa, this chapter will unpack the difficult and perhaps unwanted argument that is put forward in Afropessimistic literature. The argument posits that black abjection and by extension, its visual representation is viable and necessary for "the psychic health and well-being of the rest

of the world: black suffering is a form of human renewal (Wilderson 2014:7). In an interview with Jared Ball, Wilderson advances the idea that we ought to reformulate and start seeing the mutilation and aggression towards blackness not as a form of discrimination but as psychic health (2014:7). This reformulation then suggests that the existence of this antiblack perspective is in part a psychic relation that offers psychic health and a sense of pleasure (Jared Ball 2014:7). To stretch this argument further into the frame of visual production would be to posit that abjection is necessary for the psychic health of modern humanity and its libidinal economy. This claim has implications that are embedded in capitalist market forces that in turn shape art and visual production.

What is the libidinal economy? Why is it important to understand antiblack regimes of looking? The libidinal economy is what Jean Lyotard (in Chukrov 2014) describes as the “politics of desire”. Marxists define the libidinal economy as a “structure of feeling”. Jared Sexton (in Wilderson 2010:15) describes the libidinal economy as “the economy, or distribution and arrangement, desire and identification”. This is in line with Lyotard, who explains that the libidinal economy is the structure of desires and impulses are unconsciously inscribed into monetary exchange and the capitalist economy in general. In another instance, in her article “Venus in Two Acts”, Saidiya Hartman (2008) grapples with the immanent libidinal investment embedded in the convergence of terror and pain that pervades the written archive in relation to Venus, a black female subject. In navigating this libidinal economy Hartman (2008:2) points out that

The libidinal investment in violence is everywhere apparent in the documents, statements and institutions that decide our knowledge of the past. What has been said and what can be said about Venus *take for granted* the traffic between fact, fantasy, desire, and violence.

While Hartman is referring to the written archives from middle passage racial slavery in relation to Venus (a black woman), I believe that the afterlives that she refers to do not exclude trends of accumulation within the art market. The art market is one such case where this libidinal economy takes shape and operates. From this point of view, the art market becomes another

platform where myths about blackness can be reproduced and accumulated.. The Nigerian art critic and curator Okwui Enwezor's (2006) powerful essay, 'The Uses of Afro-pessimism' is invaluable in making this connection about this visual practice and consumption within the "global image ecology". It resonates very strongly to the libidinal economy that is evoked by Saidiya Hartman (2008) Frank Wilderson (2010) and Jared Sexton (2010). Only Enwezor is speaking directly to the global images of Africa and in doing so, Enwezor evokes Mbembe's essay 'Time on the Move', which has been interpreted as an afropessimist text.

In the 'Uses of Afro-pessimism', Enwezor brings our attention to two competing visual ideas of Africa. The first one is made up of African ideas about Africa that Africans like himself, including Africanists and African scholars, hold for themselves. Although African ideas about Africa are heterogeneous, it is important to note that they generally stand in stark contrast and in many ways clash and are in dissonance with the ways in which the world creates and consumes its image of Africa. The world's image of Africa is pervasive and hegemonic; particularly when he considers the accolades and rewards feted on its producers. More importantly, by posing the question, "Can the photographic event of Afro-pessimism be overcome?" Enwezor (2006:1) frames Afro-pessimism as a visual "photographic event" and this aspect links to the thematic structure of this chapter. His essay was 'The Uses of Afro-Pessimism' was published as part of the exhibition catalogue *Snap Judgements: New Positions in Contemporary African Photography* which is an exhibition of African photography. In this essay, Enwezor (2006:8) appeals for a break with this Afro-pessimist lenses that the world wants. He appeals for a mode of seeing that goes beyond pathology, a mode of seeing underpinned by visual practices that recognise coevalness

I want us to direct attention to the multiple ways of representing African life and space to enunciate forms of visual practice that open us up to the facts that we not only share the same space, but also the same time. In other words, I am speaking about visual practices that recognize coevalness

that reach beyond stock images that have endured until now as the iconography of the “abandoned” continent

Through appealing for a recognition of coevalness Africa and thereby an incorporation into the human fold, Okwui Enwezor asks spectators to see Africans in “human form”. A streak of doubt and scepticism is not lost in Enwezor’s (2004:8) humanist demand especially in connection to Kevin Carters picture of the Sudanese child:

Is a living corpse, such as the image of the Sudanese child suggests, capable of being a proper subject? Can photography itself breathe life into the lifeless body in order to win it *recognition* as to be *counted amongst the living*? In short, can Carters picture, confer on this nameless child the status of *personhood*? (Emphasis mine)

An air of critical doubt seems to haunt Enwezor’s humanist argument for a recognition of a coevalness. Moreover, perhaps it is at that point, where Enwezor is Afro-pessimism and the Afropessimism by way of Wilderson and Sexton diverges. In this light, Enwezor’s exhibition can be read as *a refusal* to indulge this gaze, because in his own words, “these metaphors of violence cheapen our understanding of the cultural context”. What is undeniable is the vocabulary that informs Enwezor’s analysis and its intersection with Afropessimism’s framing of the global libidinal economy. This is evident in the crux of Enwezor’s argument that points out how entire visual industries are dependent on a western conscience that turns Africans into specters. According to Enwezor (2006:2), in the Western photographic imaginary, the African subject is forced to negotiate a relationship between man and animal or is curiously erased from images of scenic landscapes.

Furthermore, Enwezor, describes how in relation to the representation of Africa, the western image world is a “vampiric machine” that stages a phantasmagoria of entropy where the

African bodies appear “defamiliarised” and “monstrous”. Under this gaze, Africa appears as the “wasteland” of the “bizarre” and “outrageous”. More importantly while exposing this angle the author is acutely aware of the ways in which African photographers are positioned to participate in these “grotesque ceremonies of self-crucifixion. This line evokes Mbembe’s reference to autophagia in relation to artistic engagements with the visual archive. Despite the undercurrent appeal to recognition, where Enwezor’s piece fits into a larger paradigm of social death is in its affirmation of the image world’s investment in the image of African suffering and alterity.

Lyotard claims that we are unconsciously invested in the capitalist economy of exchange; the art world can be interpreted as visual matrix where phantasms (fantasies), collective fantasies, are affirmed, sold and circulated by the market. As Lyotard (in Chukrov 2014) points out, capitalism and the libidinal economy are intertwined; this can be detected by looking at the way that enjoyment phantasms (fantasies) circulate within this visual framework of production and exchange.

In order to give substance to what I have outlined, I will use this discursive framework to critically discuss a film by the Dutch artist Renzo Martens (2008), titled *Enjoy Poverty III*, and Ayana V. Jackson’s (2011) set of photographs titled *Poverty Pornography*. My analytic perspective sharply foregrounds spectatorship. I believe that centralising spectatorship as a discursive relation creates a theoretically productive analysis. In 2010, the artist Ayana V. Jackson convened a panel on “Poverty Pornography”. She brought together four notable art historians and curators such as Thembinkosi Goniwe, Khwezi Gule, Gabi Ngcobo and the political theorist Achille Mbembe. The panel discussed the pervasive phenomenon of poverty pornography in contemporary photography. Jackson’s most critical set of questions went as follows:

To what degree are we fetishizing the impoverished black body? i.e. othering ourselves? Have we found ourselves stuck in a trend of profiting from our suffering?

The use of a collective “we” in Jackson’s enquiry suggests that black people are the primary agents in their ossification as objects for consumption. Masochism emerges when black people find themselves in situations marked by antiblackness (Gordon 1997:78). I use the term “masochism” tentatively, with the problematic in mind that black subjects do not actively seek pleasure within the antiblack structure that entraps them. Terms such as “consent” and “agency” are expressions of power that cannot wholly capture the complexity of the structure of antiblack regimes of visibility.

The question of the viability of poverty porn is usually counterpointed with the role of empathy as an alleviating factor. However, by taking seriously the concept of the black fungibility, that the black body through violence can be consumed in ways both imagined and unimagined, this allows an understanding that blackness can be consumed and further negated, even in the humanitarian act of extending empathy. Saidiya Hartman (1997:18) brings clarity to this relation when, in “Innocent Amusements”, she narrates the story of a slave abolitionist by the name of Rankin, who believes that “pain provides the common language of humanity; it extends humanity to the dispossessed and, in turn, remedies the indifference of the callous” (Hartman 1997:18). As an act of empathetic identification Rankin, the well-intentioned white abolitionist, then narrates a scene imagining himself enslaved with his wife and children. According to Hartman, (1997:20) Rankin’s ease at this empathetic identification is due to the fungibility of the black body. Hartman argues that even the exercise of empathy reinforces the violence inherent in making black bodies into objects because he merely replaces the bodies of slaves with the bodies of himself and his own family. As a result this act, “fails to expand the space of the other but merely places the self in its stead” (Hartman 1997:20). Furthermore, Hartman problematizes a move, which, “requires that the white body be positioned in the place of the black body in order to make this suffering visible and intelligible” (Hartman 1997:20).

Therefore empathy becomes another vehicle form in which negation is enacted for, in the attempt of making the other's suffering one's own, this act is occluded by the other's obliteration (Wilderson 2010: 90).

5.1 ENJOY POVERTY: A GOOD PICTURE

If poverty is like a gift that creates a deeper understanding, you also give it back to the world, people come to visit you, and it is something that makes us happy in a way (Martens 2008).

The preceding statement is uttered by Renzo Martens, the Dutch artist in his film documentary *Enjoy Poverty III* (2008). Martens (2008) is addressing a group of struggling local photographers whom he has gathered in order to tutor on the prospects of hitting the big time. "Poverty is a resource," lectures Martens, "you need to make choices based on rationality, not on traditions," he adds. Martens has voyaged from Holland into the war-stricken interior of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). In the film Martens claims to be in the DRC to launch what he calls "an emancipation program" where he preaches to locals, advising them that their greatest resource is poverty. He has designed a programme that will enable local photographers to get access to the means of production, particularly access to capital via the western media industry. This access, he claims, they can achieve through taking and selling photographs depicting scenes of poverty and suffering (for instance rotting corpses, malnourished children and raped women). These are images that are routinely taken by foreign photojournalists (and by artists like himself) and sold to Western media outlets in Europe and America for a fortune. In an interview with Joe Penny (2010), Renzo Martens defines his film documentary firstly and primarily as a work of art that "duplicates" and repeats the prior violation:

Yes, it is primarily a piece of art, for sure, and the reason for that is, as you said clearly, in your introductory statement, in the film there is a person who does all these things. He says you are now being exploited through media. And then we see that the guy who does that in the film, Renzo, exploits people

through media, too. He just gives people a view and leaves to a relatively comfortable life in Europe. And then you say, and that's the important part, that this is like a parable for most Western activity in the Third World. So what happens in this film, the piece, Episode III, doesn't critique by showing something that is bad, it critiques by *duplicating* what may be bad. On the one hand it gives some critique within the film, oh, media might be bad, it exploits you, take possession of the means of production; on the other hand I, the guy in the film, do exactly the same thing, or maybe not exactly but pretty much exactly the same thing and in the end then just leave.

It is precisely the conscious duplication and repetition of what the film critiques as being bad, that gives this film its coherence as a piece of art. It is consciously aware of its presence. This duplication of bad that Martens points out can be linked to David Marriott's (2017) argument in "The Perfect Beauty of Black Death", where he describes how art can be a form of violation that seeks its own event. This repetition of suffering that Marten's film enacts can be thought of within the same vein as what Marriot (2017) describes, "as a new kind of avant-garde cruelty and perhaps even fantasy of a murderous violence that is its own event". Therefore, the medium of art itself in its conscious duplication of the scene of suffering becomes the violation. As Martens (2010) explains in the same interview:

So the critique of the film is not so much in the action that the guy Renzo undertakes in the film, the critique of the film is the film as a whole, it's the duplication, it's the copy in a way of existing power relationships ... Most documentary films critique, or reveal or show some outside phenomena, like oh this is bad, or this is good, or this is tragic or what have you. In this film, it is not the subject that is tragic, like poverty in Africa; it is the very way that the film deals with the subject that is as tragic. So that is why it is a piece of art, because it deals with its own presence, it deals with its own terms and conditions; it is not a referential piece. It is auto-referential.

In the film Martens advises the local photographers to stop taking photos of parties and weddings, as they are unprofitable. He suggests that they instead focus their cameras on the grim scenes of violence and disaster that sell like hotcakes in Europe. "Poverty is a natural resource,"

says Martens (2009) and Africans should be in charge of their own resources, their natural resources. Martens travels by a rickety makeshift canoe paddled by a local group of men to get to



Figure 5, *Enjoy (Please) Poverty III.* (Screenshot by author)

Basankusu, an impoverished little town up north in Equateur Province. Martens and his porters trek through thick jungle and wade upriver on their way to the villages of Ndeke and Lisafa. In a deliberate way, Martens evokes nineteenth-century Conradian (1899) scenes from the book *The Heart of Darkness* that were inspired by Henry Morton Stanley's¹¹⁶ infamous expeditions in the Congo prior to its capture as King Leopold's estate. Interestingly; King Leopold II cloaked his brutal conquest of the Congo as a charitable and philanthropic intervention, in other words he masked the terror and brutality of his conquest under the language of care and humanitarianism. This is precisely what Martens evokes through his zaesthetic and rhetorical repertoires in the film.

¹¹⁶ Henry Morton Stanley was a Welsh journalist and explorer known for his famous expeditions in central Africa during the 1870s. In 1878, following his successive journeys through central Africa in search of David Livingston, Stanley published his famous book *Through the Dark Continent*. According to Adam Hochschild (1998:68) in *King Leopold's Ghost* Henry Morton Stanley was instrumental as King Leopold's agent in securing the Congo as his personal estate, leading up to the "Scramble for Africa" Berlin conference in 1885.

Martens' project to uplift the locals inevitably fails, and the local photographers regretfully learn that they have no chance of selling their pictures to international media institutions. They learn this after having gone in and out of the local clinics in pursuit of "a good picture". By the international media standards and its desires, according to Martens, "a good picture" has to conform to, or include any of the following scenarios: dead corpses, raped women, or severely malnourished children. The spectator quickly learns that what we see as a crushing disappointment for the locals is in fact an accomplishment for Martens: the whole 'emancipation' project was a ruse designed to affirm his ultimate point, as indicated by the title of his film

The locals have been useful in so far as they served as raw material for his entire film, that he will edit and showcase in art festivals in Europe, where he lives and works. When they ask if they will at least get to see the film that he has recorded of them, he explicitly tells them no, saying that it is not made nor intended for their spectatorship but it is for white and affluent audience in Europe. Martens instead encourages them to submit to their wretched circumstances and quickly accept that nothing is going to change, see Figure 5.1



Figure 5.1. Renzo Martens. *Enjoy Poverty*. 2009 (Screenshot by author)

Martens cuts a messianic figure as he moves from one village to the next delivering the good news: “Enjoy Poverty!” is his gospel. He unwittingly parodies what the art historian Teju Cole (2012) aptly coined as the “White-Savior Industrial Complex” in an online article published in *The Atlantic* in which he critiques the infamous Kony2012, a documentary that advocates humanitarian intervention in Africa:

Africa has provided a space onto which white egos can conveniently be projected. It is a liberated space in which the usual rules do not apply: a nobody from America or Europe can go to Africa and become a godlike savior or, at the very least, have his or her emotional needs satisfied.

It is precisely within this libidinal economy that Martens’ *Enjoy Poverty III* operates. His performative intervention lies inside his steel trunk that his porters carry for him along the journey. Inside the trunk lies a set of letters made up of neon lights; for his performative intervention,

Martens assembles the letters into a sentence: “Enjoy (Please), Poverty”. “What do you see?” asks Martens. “*Pauvreté*” mumbles the villager. “It’s not *pauvreté*, its poverty, it is in English, for the audience it needs to be in English,” explains Martens.

The artist mounts the words onto a large wooden thatched rail that has been loosely cobbled together for the event. A portable generator is started up and the blue neon letters “Enjoy (Please) Poverty” beam through the dark. The fast beat of a drum picks up, creating a celebratory mood. The blue neon lights illuminate the expectant dark faces of villagers, creating a blue-black kaleidoscope of dancing and singing.



Figure 5.2. Renzo Martens. *Enjoy Poverty*. 2009 (Screenshot by author)



Figure 5.3. Renzo Martens. *Enjoy Poverty*. 2009 (Screenshot by author)

The vibrant scenes that follow are of the dancing villagers whose black bodies gleam in blue light. There is something profoundly evocative in these scenes. I believe they carry an aesthetic significance that I wish to briefly reflect on below.

5.2 THE BLACK AND BLUE

Black and blue, blue-black or navy blue is a combination of colours that generally carry significance in the black cultural and sonic¹¹⁷ lexicon. In South Africa, when an individual is described as navy blue, it is usually followed by the verdict that they are too dark or ‘too black’:

¹¹⁷ Furthermore, on another level, blue is a rich signifier that refers to more than just skin shade. The colour blue resonates at a sonic level of signification, as ‘the blues’, an African American music genre that was conceived in the American South. The blues emerges distinctively as a melancholic music genre that in part captures the inconsolable despair of a downtrodden people. Interestingly, the African American philosopher Cornel West often refers to the blues as a lyrical response to the monstrous, where catastrophe and celebration, pain and joy sit side by side. This is a critical point that I link to the act of suffering and smiling, which I will later expand on in the document.

this person might be called a *kwerekwere*¹¹⁸ depending on who is looking. Having a blue-black complexion therefore signifies, in an essentialist way, someone who looks quintessentially African and is therefore positioned on the lowest rung of the pigmentocratic totem pole. Black South Africans typically prefer to perceive themselves in a stereotypical way, as a people whose skin colours range along a palette of yellows, ochres and browns, but not black and definitely not blue-black.

This perception has had devastating effects on our post-apartheid nationalist psyche under the moniker of rainbowism; this in part I link to the Afrophobic attacks in 2008: I expand on this in the following chapter. Being too black, blue-black, is a pathological descriptor that always sticks to other Africans, the ‘real’ Africans. The term “pigmentocracy” describes societies where hierarchies are organised according to skin tone; these hierarchies occur particularly in intra-racial communities. In pigmentocratic societies, lighter-skinned members enjoy a status that is synonymous with white privilege. It is not merely wealth and status that are accrued by the lighter-skinned but standards of beauty and value are also measured against their complexion. Pigmentocracy is an organising principle that forms one of the many anchors of a global white supremacy and a global antiblackness. As a direct consequence, a depigmentation (skin lightening) industry thrives in Africa and South Asia. According to Afua Hirsch (2017), it encourages the premise that “white is right”. An article that appeared in 2017 responds to the “white is right” adverts¹¹⁹ for brands such as Nivea and Dove Hirsch (2017) comments on the ideological schema of depigmentation:

Soap brands such as Pears built a narrative that cast Africa as dark and its people as dirty, the solution to which – conveniently – was soap. Cleansing, lightening and civilising in one handy bar.

¹¹⁸ *Kwerekwere* is a derogatory slang term for black African immigrants. The word has onomatopoeic origins, that derive from locals claiming to hear *kwirikwirikwiri* when African immigrants speak (Negash in Mpe 2011: xv)

¹¹⁹ This incident occurred in October 2017.

The commercial viability of depigmentation further affirms the global dynamic of antiblackness, which suggests that white bodies do not necessarily require being physically present in order for whiteness to sustain its hegemony. Glen Ligon (2017), in his recent exhibition and essay *Kinds of Blue Black*, correspondingly states that in African American usage, blue-black describes a kind of skin tone that is considered synonymous with the African continent. Within such an ideological context, the image of dark-skinned Africans singing and dancing under the blue neon lights takes on a familiar throwback quality. The Congolese villagers become the exotic blue-black Africans that evoke early travelogue imperialist encounters from Henry Morton Stanley's "Darkest Africa". The villagers therefore are curated to animate the visual clichés and schemas of the early imperial archive.

5.3 THE DARK CONTINENT AND THE GLOBAL UNCONSCIOUS

In *Return to the Postcolony: Specters of Colonialism in Contemporary Art*, the art critic T. J. Demos (2013:8) explains how the colonial era and its injustices never ended. He postulates that colonial relations remain submerged and repressed in European consciousness, whilst on the other hand they stubbornly emerge in discourse and representation. According to Demos (2013), Europe exercises a strategic amnesia, a misrecognition and a disavowal of Europe's complicity in sustaining the inequality that defines its relationship with Africa. These traces of complicity can be found in contemporary art and media images of poverty pornography. What is critical about the work of Renzo Martens' *Enjoy Poverty III* is how it brutally exposes the images' own (and its own) "embeddedness in a system that commodifies the titillating commodification of others", thus Demos (2013: 99) invokes it as a film that stages a return and repetition.

Enjoy Poverty is framed as a form of contemporary art that enables 'returns', as indicated by the title of Demos's text *Return to the Postcolony: Specters of Colonialism in Contemporary Art*. Demos uses the language of the occult in order to describe this phenomenon: the nature of this return is of a spectral kind, a haunting. From this perspective, the postcolony becomes a space of

hauntings, a space “out of the world”; in Mbembe’s¹²⁰ words, it becomes a space empty of human consciousness and history in a Hegelian sense¹²¹ (Mbembe 2015:173). In the global unconscious, out of all places in Africa, the Congo signifies pathologically as “Africa proper” to echo Hegel, as a microcosm of sub-Saharan Africa, as it did in Joseph Conrad’s novella (1899) *The Heart of Darkness*. The Congo continues into the twenty-first century to create a space that is negative yet positive and productive for Western subjectivity. The invention of the Congo under the Belgian King Leopold is, in Hegelian terms, devoid of human character; a dark antithesis of Europe in the Western imagination. G.W.F. Hegel is the intellectual doyen of Western philosophy. In his classic text *The Philosophy of History*, Hegel puts forward the thesis that not only is Africa a space where there is no history but more poignantly, he concludes that enslaving Africans is an occasion that “increases human feeling among Negroes”. In other words, Hegel advocates middle passage slavery and by its extension, the colonial capture of Africa as “a mode of becoming participant in higher morality and the culture connected with it”. In this way, Africans access “human” feeling through their bondage (Hegel in Armstrong 2006:212).

More pertinently, Africa from this frame is the mirror in which the non-black subject can look at itself and be human. The non-black can compare itself against Africa and feel respite:

Africa is and has always been a source of raw materials. Gold and oil, cobalt and cocoa – it all flows out. But more consistently, Africa is a perpetual source of metaphor. More bluntly: Africa’s role in the Western subconscious is as a shape-shifting entity that at every turn defines what it means to be Western. More than any other ex-colony, Africa plays the indispensable role of the non-West – an all-purpose counter-example, useful no matter how one wants to define oneself. Does the West want to think of itself as civilised? Here is barbarian Africa. Modern and tolerant? Homophobia in

¹²⁰ A comparison can be drawn between Demos’s (2013) and Mbembe’s (2001, 2015) otherworldly delineation of Africa.. Mbembe further states, “It is present day Africa that [I] have in mind as it emerges, in modern and contemporary discourse as that night devoid of consciousness, consigned to the uttermost fringe of reality, of which Hegel said that in never attains to immanent differentiation”.

¹²¹ I use this term in reference to the German philosopher Georg W.F Hegel’s denigrating treatment of Africa. In his famous lectures, *The Philosophy of History*, Hegel (in Kuykendall 1993:572) declared Africa as the unhistorical; undeveloped spirit – still involved in the conditions of mere nature; devoid of morality, religions and political constitution. As a result, Hegel championed Europe’s enslavement and colonisation of Africa. Hegel believed slavery causes the increase of human feeling among the Negroes; in this sense blacks could only enter the human fold through bondage

This frame of thought is not a new one, it in fact logically re-enacts a Hegelian treatment of Africa. For Hegel (in Armstrong 2003:210)¹²², the enslavement and colonisation of Africans is rationalised as a path towards their humanisation; a ticket out of barbarity for which they are expected to give thanks. On a general scope, Western media representation and their concomitant humanitarian organisations have been the primary site from which viewers have ad nauseum been interpellated into scenes of black abjection. Other fields of representation including tourism, for example township tourism, and the visual arts in the form of contemporary art, are a continuum of these voyeuristic scenes. Sadomasochistic aesthetics underwrite the scopic regimes of poverty pornography, but it is important to bear in mind that it is not exclusive to the poverty porn paradigm.

5.4 ENJOY POVERTY AND POVERTY PORNOGRAPHY

“What do you see?” asks Martens. “*Pauvreté*,” mumbles the villager. “It’s not *pauvreté*, its poverty, it is in English, for the audience it needs to be in English,” explains Martens. I reiterate this part as it articulates the structure of relations that determine the ultimate subject–spectator whose desires are being catered for. *Enjoy Poverty* locates the status of Congolese locals in relation to the world that ravagingly consumes not just their mineral resources but their poverty as well. The artist makes it known, and explicitly so, that the film is made for the spectatorship of Euro-America, not theirs, like the cocoa beans that they harvest for international consumers, yet never having tasted chocolate.

Enjoy Poverty analyzes the very paradigm of which it is implicated in. In the film Martens casts judgement on multinational companies that extract resources, global financial institutions that put free trade over social welfare, the media industry that capitalises from the sensational

¹²²Critical Notes of Hegel’s Treatment of Africa, Olmotade Adegbindin; Emmanuel Eze, *Western Enlightenment and the Africanza*.

scenes of poverty and wretchedness as a result. He does this whilst reproducing an iconography of poverty pornography, a crass disregard for dignity of the subjects whom he callously tells to enjoy poverty. Ayana Jackson's *Poverty Pornography*, a photographic series that is part of her exhibition *Archival Impulse*, also puts a sharp focus on this trend in contemporary art. In it, she engages with this titillating form of image making. In the same walkabout interview that I conducted with Jackson in 2014, she pertinently stated that:

In the *Poverty Pornography* series, there is a glorification of poverty, and there is also an over-representation of death, disaster, destruction, dictatorship, disease, when we see black bodies and non-European bodies, but why are we more comfortable with seeing these images (Jackson 2013).

In the preceding statement, Ayana Jackson affirms the comforting quality of these images of disaster: more pointedly, images of black abjection. My analysis stretches this effect of comfort towards pleasure and in fact, from this perspective, this affective baseline becomes the foundation from which subjective identity is formed and consolidated. In 2011, Ayana Jackson moderated a panel on the theme of “poverty pornography”. The artist invited the panellists to think about and respond to the following set of questions and suppositions that she had listed concerning the practice of poverty pornography: her list of questions that she read out to the panel are perhaps more informative than the engagement they elicit:

What is the relationship between funding sources and photographer's lens? Or is it a chicken and egg story about where aid is going and the kinds of stories we tell? Are photographers going to where the money is? How are we tracking the trajectory of our images? To what extent do we monitor our images and to what extent and by whom? What role does contemporary art play in constructing and therefore adding dimensions to popular narratives? What role do institutions play in maintenance of a static point of view? Is the lack of funding in museum institutions inhibiting the development of new ideas? Is this pushing artists to produce work towards the commercial market? What is the demeanor of masculinity in photography? Is the female photographer's voice being heard? What role do photojournalism and photo-documentary teaching practices play in all of this? To what degree are we fetishizing the impoverished Black body, i.e.

othering ourselves? Have we found ourselves stuck in a trend of profiting from our suffering? What is the significance of the African show? Are Black photographers and artists fighting themselves in the ghetto? Why is the South African art market so segregated? Where are our Black collectors? What steps are being taken to conscientize the aspiring class with regard to art practice? Are we being pessimistic or being impatient? What positive trends are we seeing coming from Africa?

Figure 5.4, *Dis Ease* is an artwork by Ayana Jackson that re-enacts Kevin Carter's¹²³ iconic photograph euphemistically titled *The Struggling Girl*, which depicts a vulture stalking an emaciated child.



Figure 5.4. Ayana V. Jackson, *Dis Ease* 2011

The photograph *Dis Ease* was exhibited as part of the *Poverty Pornography* exhibition alongside *Archival Impulse*. What concerns my argument in this chapter is perhaps the subject of

¹²³ Kevin Carter was a South African photojournalist and a member of the Bang Bang Club, a band of four white photographers who covered the townships in South Africa in the early nineties (Marinovich and Silva 2001). In 1994 Carter became a recipient of the Pulitzer Prize following a picture that he took in Sudan in 1993 of a crawling starving child being stalked by a vulture (Marinovich and Silva).

spectatorial ease within the “dis ease” that Jackson indirectly alludes to, both in her set of questions and in the title of the photograph itself. The format of the image is directly lifted from Carter’s; however, the body of the artist herself, Ayana Jackson, replaces the positions of the vulture, the child and the photographer (Kevin Carter). It is worth noting that Jackson takes all the photographs herself. The artist positions herself from all three perspectives. In the process of making her image, Ayana plays the role of the vulture, the starving child and the photographer, Kevin Carter.

The act of straddling these three different positionalities; of the victim (the child), predator (vulture) and witness-bystander (photographer), proffers a powerful commentary on the tenuous circumstances faced by black artists in their engagement with the visual archive. In their engagement with the archive often, black artists are met with the challenge of taking on racist stereotypes. The impoverished black body both in image and in the real is not an image that yields urgency; it is an image that through repetition has taken the status of a cliché. On the part of the artist, one imagines the ambivalence and uncertainty involved in assimilating and performing such roles.

Jackson’s work begs the question, “To what degree are we fetishizing the impoverished black body, i.e. othering ourselves? Have we found ourselves stuck in a trend of profiting from our suffering?” Jackson could have been posing the question to herself as she outlines a trail of thought that one has whilst looking at her work. In other words, does she not participate in the very paradigm that she problematizes in her set of questions? In different words, does Jackson not “other” or “fetishize” herself in *Dis Ease*?

In order to avoid the sticky representational politics that comes with taking photos of other people, the artist opts to turn the camera on herself, and what emerges in her narrative portraits is her own visual journey within the black archive. There is little doubt that the artist is speaking directly from her own positionality. For instance, at the walkabout, she mentions that the creation

of this body of work is inspired by the experience of living inside a female black body in the world. One can further argue that, in *Dis Ease*, Jackson inadvertently (she has mentioned that she does not think of the black spectatorship in the process of making her work) visually untangles the complex process of identification for a prospective black spectatorship that is cornered into seeing itself through the eyes of a pathological antiblackness. We see a black body predating on another, perhaps a comment on how positive self-identification with the imago, the stereotype, the cliché, the hateful object, inevitably results in self-annihilation. A self-cannibalisation. Perhaps this is what Gordon is speaking about (1995:104) when he comments on the “black antiblackness in an antiblack world, when absence reflects upon absence”. Seeing herself through the lens of her camera as both the vulture and the child may imply the inevitability of blacks assuming an antiblack consciousness. This harks back to Thembinkosi Goniwe’s response to Jackson’s *Pornography* series, which, according to the artist (Ayana Jackson), went as follows:

I invited Thembinkosi and a few other curators to have a panel discussion around the issues of poverty pornography. One of the first things Goniwe said is that we need to be careful with becoming obsessed with someone else has possessed discourse of ourselves, to the point where we forget what we have to say about ourselves. I realized that I had literally become someone else’s obsession with someone else’s possessed discourse of black bodies.

Following a brief trip to India, my partner at the time came back with an image of interest that he had taken at the university cafeteria that he frequented daily at meal times during his stay. At the entrance of the cafeteria, an image of the starving child is displayed. It is the famous image of the “struggling girl” taken by South African photojournalist Kevin Carter; the picture is reproduced in poster form. When the image was presented to me I was working on this chapter, particularly the preceding section on poverty pornography in the work of Ayana Jackson as pictured in her image *Dis Ease*

Jacques Rancière (2011:99), in his text “The Intolerable Image”, posits, “An image never stands alone, it belongs to the system of visibility that governs the status of the people represented and the kind of attention they merit”. From this paradigm, one can surmise that images such as *Dis Ease* and the poster at the cafeteria in India reinforce what we already know: the inferior status of blacks in the world. Therefore, to speak about images of abjection exclusively from the lofty heights of contemporary art, as for instance in the work of Ayana V Jackson’s *Dis Ease* and her intimations on the role of photojournalism, would be to betray the everyday mundanity of black abjection of which this picture is a snapshot. At the very least, to suspend this argument at the level of visual signification would be to betray the quotidian tolerability of black pain and abjection in the world. As Gordon (1997:75) puts it in his text *Existence in Black*, the black body does not live on the symbolic level in an anti-, black world. It is in fact to the contrary: black bodies are bound by the severity of the real, the serious material values of the real. “Whether in dream content or awake intentions, the black body always stands for what it is – the Black”¹²⁴ (Gordon (1997:75)).

¹²⁴ This is precisely why according to Sawlani (2017), it is common in India for black people to be heckled on the streets and called names such as a “bandar” (monkey) or “bhoot” (ghost/demon).



Figure 5.5. Joja M. Poster at the University of Shiv Nadar University Cafeteria in India, 2017

In Figure 5.5, an A1-sized poster is pinned at an entrance of a university cafeteria in India. On the poster, the following inscription appears, emboldened in red: “To waste food is criminal”. Below that sentence, in black, appears the following sentence: “11% of the world’s population is undernourished”. Centred in the middle of the poster is the familiar image of a child crawling to a nearby clinic in Sudan; behind a plump vulture follows it closely. “Your apathy becomes the cause of the vulture’s next meal”. Reading this poster from a humanist discursive paradigm would be to arrive at the premise that the poster is a compassionate gesture, raising our empathy and awareness

against the scourge of undernourishment experienced by 11% of the world's population. However, as Christina Sharpe points out (2016:116):

We know that when images of Black people are concerned, in their circulation, they often do not, in fact do the imaging work we expect of them.

Thus, to read this image against the assumed intentionality of the poster would be to arrive at a more difficult proposition. In the image, the child is positioned as the vulture's next meal. By extension the spectator viewer is the vulture; in other words, the spectator is as if the photographer perched with his camera, caving in, waiting his turn. If the crouching child is the meal, then the call to not waste food can be read as an instruction to devour the image of the child. The poster is another platform from where the black is accumulated and consumed; therefore, the poster is in fact promoting what it may be purporting to be against. Sharpe (2016:116) sums this apparatus of visualisation aptly:

This is even true even though and when we find images of black suffering in various publics framed in and as calls to action or calls to feel with and for. Most of these images function as a *hail* to the non-Black person in the Althusserian sense. That is, these images work to confirm the status, location, and already held opinions within dominant ideology about those exhibitions of spectacular Black bodies whose meanings remain unchanged.

It follows that the image of a starving black child at the entrance of university cafeteria in India, a place where people eat their food can be read without a semblance of irony. What does the poster call us to do? The poster calls us to consume the image presented in front of us, the half-dead child, as a form of nourishment.

5.5 SUFFERING AND SMILING

I borrow the title “Suffering and smiling” from *Shuffering and Shmiling*¹²⁵, an iconic album recorded by the afrobeat musician Fela Kuti. “Shuffering and shmiling” as a motif resonates powerfully with the premise of this chapter. I use it as a point of departure that introduces to the reader the intimate relationship between pleasure and pain. The following discussion is a meditation on the roles that pleasure and pain –intermingled in sadomasochism – play in the legibility of spectatorship within the antiblack regime of looking. To suffer while smiling or to smile while suffering can be understood as a mode of survival that has found abundant cultural expression on the continent and in the African diaspora: in the black world generally. The act of smiling whilst suffering can also be read from a poem written by Paul Lawrence Dunbar, *We Wear the Mask*, written in 1896 and later adapted by Maya Angelou in 1987 under the title *The Mask*, which deserves to be quoted at length:

They laugh to conceal their crying,
They shuffle through their dreams
They stepped 'n fetched a country
And wrote the blues in screams.
I understand their meaning,
It could and did derive
From living on the edge of death
They kept my race alive
By wearing the mask! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

The use of laughter as masquerade, the display of pleasure as a form of neutralising sufferance or being seen to be jolly whilst immersed in despair, is an act that takes on various

¹²⁵ *Shuffering and Shmiling* was recorded in 1977.

guises in colonial fantasies. The aesthetic appeal of the blackface mask is continuous with this sadomasochistic form of display, where displays of fun and frolic become vehicles of self-betrayal to echo Hartman (1997). Fanon states that the ever so grateful “eternal grin” of Uncle Remus, better known as Uncle Tom¹²⁶ in the American South, emerges from the same structural paradigm; he further explains how “we package the Negro’s grin and market it on the grand scale in our popular culture as a cloak for this masochism” (Fanon 2008: 137). Black people on the continent and in the diaspora have generally found themselves in circumstances of unremitting coercion and trepidation to the point where sadomasochistic paradigms have deeply shaped their performative aesthetics. What could be more extreme than exhibiting signals of pleasure amidst the overwhelming circumstances of pain? For the black subject, the grin is a double-edged sword that cuts both ways. Whilst to openly resist the phobogenic imago exposes one’s true feelings of contempt, it is a dangerous act that inevitably leads to further exclusion and punishment; however, to smile does not merely achieve the palatability and delectability of Fanon’s reflections: it is also a survival tactic that enables one to see another day¹²⁷.

This brings back to mind Jacob Dlamini’s (2009) *Native Nostalgia*, a text published in post-apartheid South Africa whose central premise is based on the notion of black joy within the context of apartheid. This line of thought is expressed in the book’s blurb, “What does it mean for a young black South African to say of his life under apartheid, ‘I had a happy childhood?’” In *Native Nostalgia*, Dlamini attempts to complicate the master narrative of oppression under apartheid by presenting an opportunity for celebration under the auspices of nostalgia. Dlamini’s premise skates on thin ice. His attempt at rescuing the “nuance” and the “complexity” of black life

¹²⁶ Uncle Tom is an extremely docile and servile character from the Harriet Beecher Stowe’s famous novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852). In the novel Uncle Tom is described as having a childlike simplicity of affection and forgiveness (Hall 1997:249). The general depiction of its black characters in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is viewed as racist and patronising especially by writers such as James Baldwin (1949) in his critical essay “Everybody’s Protest Novel!”. Today, the term Uncle Tom has also become an insult used to describe a black person who shows subservience to whites or is otherwise considered complicit in the oppression of blacks.

¹²⁷ In Marriot’s (2000) chapter “Photography and lynching” in *On Black Men*, he examines what it means for black men to identify with and be interpolated into the phobic image; in other words, he recalls the process of identifying positively with white desire.

from being crowded out by the narrative of suffering can run the risk of giving integrity to the very system that he claims to not be endorsing. Dlamini's fond recollections of life under apartheid, "the good old days", can easily collapse into a celebratory narrative of the oppressed, especially when black social life is narrativised through the selective prism nostalgia.

Under the duress of coloniality, the interstice between black joy and pain is a tenuous one. Modern visibility is underpinned by scenes of negrophobogenesis¹²⁸ that have enjoyment value. To write a narrative of joy and fond recollection within the structural context of apartheid oppression that is prefaced by contemporary black sentiments that state that "it was better under the apartheid regime", can, to a certain extent, follow a sadomasochistic plot and I state this is not to negate the occurrence of black social life and the ways in which black joy can also be interpreted as a mode of resistance. It is the unspoken ambiguity and its sadomasochistic tensions that the discussion of this thesis is interested in, particularly, in the ways that it is carried by visual form.

Negrophobia and negrophobogenesis are processes that deeply inform the theoretical bedrock of this chapter, as it underwrites my thesis¹²⁹ as a whole. Take for instance, the carnivalesque atmosphere of human zoos and Southern lynching scenes: these visual paradigms categorically affirm the recreational and entertainment value of black subjugation and abjection¹³⁰. Historically, these are moments when, in the words of Frank Wilderson¹³¹ (2015), "The world lived its unconscious and conscious life on the surface". The invention of the camera as a recording medium merely produces in mass and democratises the enjoyment of these scenes. The spectator no longer has to be at the scene physically, in real time order to participate in the regenerative

¹²⁸ I use negrophobogenesis in line with the concepts of negrophobia and negrophobogenesis introduced by Frantz Fanon (2008) in Chapter Six, "The Negro and Psychopathology" in *Black Skin White Masks*.

¹²⁹ In Chapter One, I provide a lengthy reading on the Black modern archive and how it is founded on what Fanon advocates as a phobic process of negrophobogenesis.

¹³⁰ This point is expressed by Leon Litwack (2000), in his essay 'Hellhounds' published in the book *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*.

¹³¹ Wilderson states this in "Re-Imagining the Black Body: Race, Memory, and the Excavation of Freedom Now", an interview with Justin Desmangles

sadomasochistic performance. “The lynching photograph announces itself like poetry, a cultural accompaniment to the production of white community” (Wilderson 2015). Sarah Baartman’s story (see chapter three) brings this relation closer to home. Baartman is a figure whose trajectory symbolically encapsulates these manifold layers of meaning her journey may symbolically hold explanatory power to the format that post-lynching spectacles unfolded. In “The Black Body as Souvenir in American Lynching”, Harvey Young (2005:640) plots out the structure that post-lynching events followed:

What captures my attention is something that appears within the majority of these disciplines but has received scant attention in each: the dismemberment of the Black body for souvenirs following the lynching event. I am interested in this feature, in large part, because I am haunted by the image of white hands, variably male or female, adult or child, holding aloft a slice of Sam Hose’s crisped liver, Richard Coleman’s burnt flesh, or George Ward’s toe. As a means of working through my own complicated relationship with this image while simultaneously spotlighting an often-neglected area of lynching scholarship, I here focus upon the lynched Black body in the aftermath of the lynching event and variously read it in terms of the souvenir, the fetish and the performance.

Dismemberment and castration were notable aspects of lynching rituals that yielded the pleasure of preserving the memory after the event; spectators could scramble for the remains and take them home as a keepsake, a *memento mori* for those who could not be there (Young 2005; Marriott 2000). More importantly, what is of keen interest to my argument is how lynching victims are sadistically imagined to enjoy their own castration and death. As perverse as this concept may seem, it powerfully exposes the visual terrorism of negrophobogenesis and its uncompromising demands of black identification, which are essential to the production of antiblack black enjoyment. Consider a story told by Howard Lester in (Marriott 2000:6) on the lynching of Claude Neal:

After taking the nigger to the woods ... they cut off his penis. He was made to eat it. Then they cut off his testicles and made him eat them and say he liked it.

Marriott goes on to meticulously scrutinise the meaning of this act. He proposes that it is precisely in the confessed (seeming) enjoyment of eating his own genitals where the assembled spectators get their satisfaction. It is precisely in the black man assuming white desires as his own that turns on the onlookers, the crowd.

To hear him desire his own death – and so turn their terrible pleasure into his own violent wish – was to construct the vision of the castrated Black man as one actively seeking the pleasures of castration (Marriott 2000:6).

Sarah Baartman's ominous journey, shipped from Africa to Europe, ends with her dismembered in a laboratory, her genitals pickled in a jar: her body is treated like a souvenir, a trophy, displayed at a museum in Paris until 1974. Lynching scenes regularly ended with sprawled out, distorted and dismembered body parts and ultimately pickled genitals. We can begin to understand these as sights/sites of identity formation. "The lynching photograph jettisons a production of selfhood, before you got a Kodak you had to slice the genitals and put them in a jar" (Wilderson 2015)¹³². Poverty pornography can be argued to emanate from this tradition of visual culture, and it has successfully found its way into sphere of contemporary art photography and performance as illustrated in the work of numerous contemporary artists such as Renzo Martens, Brett Bailey and Pieter Hugo, to name a few. Antiblack scopic regimes or Antiblack regimes of looking reflect a visual order that naturalises the gaze of the world upon bodies of African descent. I am referring here specifically to bodies whose blackness is a fact; in other words, bodies that are marked by their over-availability and over-violability to scrutiny and consumption in whatever way spectators imagine and desire. The same is not equivalent for white bodies whose sanctity is globally preserved, as Njabulo Ndebele (2007:137) states in his text *Fine Lines from the Box*:

Wherever the white body is violated in the world, severe retribution follows somehow for the perpetrators who are non-

¹³² The quote is from a video of Frank Wilderson getting interviewed by Justin Desmangles. in 2015. It is titled "Re-Imagining the Black Body: Race, Memory, and the Excavation of Freedom Now," an interview with *YouTube*. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DFo-GNfyD9g&t=2s>. Accessed on the 6 November 2017

white, regardless of the social status of the white body. The white body is inviolable and that inviolability is in direct proportion to the global vulnerability of the Black body.

This statement has been iterated a number of times in recent post-apartheid critical writing pertaining to black woundedness and the gaze that follows it: in Carli Coetzee's *Accented Futures* (2013), in Derek Hook's *(Post) Apartheid Conditions* (2014), and in Kylie Thomas's *Impossible Mourning* (2014) – texts that I refer to briefly in my argument. In the unpacking of the antiblackscopic regime, the task of this chapter is to foreground the idea of the libidinal economy. I consult the notion of the libidinal economy in order to give an explanatory account of how the relations of slavery are reproduced in the postcolonial image industry. My discussion is fundamentally predicated on the sensations of “pleasure” and “enjoyment”; these are sensations that I repeatedly turn and return to in the effort of making sense of a global fixation with the image of black abjection. Although the terms “enjoyment” and “pleasure” can easily be thought of as interchangeable, as synonyms, in essence they do not mean the same thing, especially in the nuanced manner in which they are enunciated in psychoanalysis. As I have mentioned in chapter four, the psychoanalyst Derek Hook (2013), in “Apartheid's Corps Morcelé”¹³³, writes at length about black bodily destruction, or the pornography of death in post-apartheid visual cultures.

In “Apartheid's Corps Morcelé”, Hook (2013:49) gives us a psychoanalytical perspective on how South Africa's apartheid culture and, by extension, global culture from where apartheid derives, reproduce “the trope of the black body in a state of destruction”; this, he argues, reveals a shared global social fantasy that dominant groups identify with. From this perspective, such images are both jubilantly loved and hated as narcissistically gratifying objects: “there is a wishfulness about them, they could be said to visualise a desire, indeed to function like a dream in that they picture a wish even if in this instance the wish is one of corporeal violence” (Hook 2013:56).

¹³³ “*Corps Morcelé*” is a Lacanian term that translates in the English language to “The body in pieces”.

Afropessimism ontologises this phenomenon as the slave relation. Hartman's text understands this visual paradigm as reflective of the affective dimensions of mastery and servitude (Hartman 1997:25). Saidiya Hartman writes on "black enjoyment" in her book *Scenes of Subjection*. Hartman (1997:23) puts forward that the construction of black enjoyment was often used to demonstrate that black people are indifferent to suffering: in effect, it is used to minimise the crime of slavery and its aftermaths (which in this text I recognise as colonialism and apartheid). To go by Hartman's definition (1997:23), the term enjoyment means:

... the exercise of a right; the promise and function of a right,
[the promise and function of a] privilege or incorporeal
hereditament; comfort, consolation, contentment, ease,
happiness, pleasure and satisfaction.

The investment in black enjoyment that Hartman articulates as a simulated enjoyment or a simulated jollity functions as an instrument of rendering black pain undetectable and uncommunicable. This sadomasochistic phantasmatic principle is present in the visual and performative tradition of blackface minstrelsy. In his essay on "Racial Masquerade and Sadomasochism", Stephen Johnson (2012) further uses Hartman's premise to pertinently delineate the pleasure of the blackface act as fundamentally sadomasochistic in the sense that:

This pleasure combines the fantasy of subjection with the
fantasy that its objects willingly entered into it, that the
subjection is pleasurable in its own right to the masochist.

This curious form of enjoyment is because it is a form of pleasure that is contingent on disavowal; it has a pleasure is paradoxically sourced from the act of denial. Recall that after Frantz Fanon¹³⁴ (1967:112) is hailed by the frightened child in the train, the "Look a negro!" moment, he resorts to laughing himself to tears. According to Yancy (2008), the frightened boy represents the eyes of white society, the eyes of the world/humanity. "I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter became impossible". Donning the mask, using laughter to conceal a cry, evoking

¹³⁴ In *Black Skin White Masks*.

a coerced enjoyment of pain, I argue in this chapter, reveal the psychic dimensions of domination, which function to normalise the sadistic sensations embedded in power relations. The works of visual culture, particularly photography and film, bring this relation or schema into a sharp focus. From this aspect, *Black Skin, White Masks* prevails as a canonical text in visual culture as it highlights the encounter of a black spectator with the racial imago: Fanon captures the phobogenic image both real and imaginary as it shatters the black ego and sprawls the black body – remember Sarah Baartman and the southern lynching scenes.

Black Skin, White Masks is a fundamental text in visual criticism; further, according to David Marriott¹³⁵ (2007:185), it is a text that is central to the examination of racial identification and visual culture in general, especially in its dominant conjuring of black subjects as phobogenic. For an uncritical black spectatorship that may arguably not yet have fully formed a resisting identification as identified by Manthia Diawara (1988:66), the imago is a locus of passive identification; it is a coordinate from where blacks hate themselves as whites do, or, inversely, enjoy their own suffering as whites do (Marriott). It is precisely from this locus of sadomasochism that I wish to further my commentary. I base the structure of my argument mainly on Amber Jamilla Musser's (2014) text, *Sensational Flesh: Race, Power and Masochism*, and Lewis Gordon's *Bad Faith and Antiracist Racism*. I follow on from Amber Musser's claim that masochism in the form of enjoyment has analytic purchase. Musser (2014:2) claims that masochism is important not in and of itself but rather in its relational capacity, in other words it is important because it exists in a set of relations between individuals and structures of power. Further, Musser (2014:3) suggests that, in order to understand what is at stake in masochism, one has to theorise the structure of sensation that reinforces the performances of submission underlying

¹³⁵ Marriott (2007) makes this point in his book *Haunted Life: Visual Culture and Black Modernity*: a text that I closely rely on in my discussion in this chapter.

it. Being the object of a gaze is to be in a submissive position. In this way, we can think about the idea of the black subject existing in absence, in other words, in objecthood.

This sadomasochistic paradigm lures us into the realm of Lewis Gordon's (1995, 1999) black existential project, hailed by his landmark text *Bad Faith and Antiracism*. In delineating that black bodies exist in bad faith, Gordon (1995:97) postulates that the body has at least three characteristics. The first characteristic "is the perspective of consciousness". In the second characteristic, "the body is seen by others" and the third characteristic is from the consciousness of the perspective of being seen by others". With the use of Jean Paul Sartre's existential paradigm of bad faith, Gordon argues that these three characteristics correlate into two dimensions of bad faith: sadism and masochism. Sadism is comprised of the first characteristic and the denial of the second and the third. It is a body that is not seen by others and furthermore it is a body that disavows the consciousness of being seen by others, and this Gordon says is a form of hate consciousness (Gordon 1995: 97).

Masochism is the affirmation of the second and the third characteristics, but a denial of the first; it is body that exists to be enjoyed as an object for others. For better clarity, let us unpack the meaning of bad faith as it relates to the paradigm of sadomasochism. In his introduction, Gordon (1995:1) posits that what antiracism does essentially is to "wrench human beings into the most extreme visual metaphors of difference: from the light to the most dark, from the fullness of colour (something) to its absence (nothing), from white, that is, to Black". What Jean Paul Sartre coined as *mauvais foi* translates to "bad faith" in English. Bad faith is a phenomenon whereby subjects, due to social forces, adopt false views or fallacies and, according to Sartre (in Gordon 1995, 1999), bad faith limits human freedom: in other words, bad faith is a negation of freedom. For instance, processes such as apartheid and Jim Crow can be seen as institutional forms of bad faith that construct "a fraudulent reality that is nevertheless a reality" (Gordon 1995, 1999).

Put differently, and still in Gordon's (1999:8) words, "in bad faith I flee a displeasing truth for a pleasing falsehood. I must convince myself that a falsehood is in fact true. I therefore lie to myself that a falsehood is in fact true". The use of the subjective in this statement, although pertinent in its explanatory power, can be misread to being consistent with a type of philosophical scholarship that collapses structural and institutional dimensions of racism into the individual (Milazzo 2016:1). One of the goals of this chapter has been to bring clarity to how sadomasochistic fantasy coheres the black subject within an antiblack visual paradigm of the gaze and spectatorship. To reiterate Gordon, masochism refers to bodies that primarily exist to be enjoyed as objects for others.

These bodies are easily made available for the pleasure of others. This suggests that such bodies are not in the first instance oriented for their own consciousness. In a conference paper on space and contemporary art in 2016, Thembinkosi Goniwe states that in South Africa, although blacks now live in a world governed by black politicians, blacks remain not primarily for themselves: "their being and becoming are subject to the socio-economic conditions dictated by whites" (Goniwe in Carli Coetzee 2013:68). Such bodies can be enjoyed as captive bodies. "Being for the captor" (Spillers 1987). It is in relation to this form of enjoyment that I wrap up this chapter with a poem by Aryan Kaganof.

I am vampire

The blood I drink is Black suffering

Black suffering brings me back to life

It is not land and minerals that I want to colonize.

I have those already, all mine.

I require the entire Black soul

Black Suffering is my daily bread

Happy successful Blacks are invisible to me

I do not recognize them

They are already too white by far

I am a vampire

I engorge myself on Black suffering

And then, replete, I go back to my white world.

Because I can

Aryan Kaganof, 2010, *New Frank Talk*

CONCLUSION: CRUEL OPTIMISM ON AFROFUTURISM AND RAINBOWISM

I am just uneasy when Afrofuturists become so celebratory. Its like, “What are you celebrating for Christ’s sake?” There is actually nothing to celebrate. They should be full of more seething discontent.

(Kodwo Eshun, *Afrofuturism, Afropessimism and the Politics of Abstraction: A Conversation with Kodwo Eshun*, 2012)

Black life is not lived in the world that the world lives in, but it is lived underground, in outer space

(Jared Sexton, *The Social Life of Social Death*, 2011)

This chapter is a layered critique of the ideology of futurity that is engendered in post-apartheid discourse and in its aesthetic inflections within the genre of Afrofuturism. The birth of ‘rainbowism’ was the first wave of the democratic nation-building project in 1994. It is perhaps now widely recognised that rainbowism¹³⁶ may have perished alongside the death of Nelson Mandela in 2013: this is attributed to his death and the manner that it opened up a scathing “Mandela was a sell-out” narrative, an unprecedented criticism of Mandela’s post-apartheid legacy. This chapter takes a slightly different angle: it seeks to analyze the prospective nostalgia of rainbowism alongside the easy optimism of Afrofuturism that has been blooming of late in the visual arts space; in this regard, I unpack the Afro-futuristic work of Gerald Machona, *Vabvakure*.

¹³⁶It is worth reiterating that rainbowism initially derives from Tutu's expression of South Africans as the "Rainbow People of God" (Gqola 2001:99). What is also of particular interest to this argument is the connection that can be easily drawn between his position as a Christian and moral figure and his memorable message of hope that is structurally inscribed into the ethos of the “new South Africa”. Here we witness the use of hope as a deferring strategy, particularly in the manner that the call for hope adjoins the spiritual and the political. In the Calvin Warrens (2015) text, *The Politics of Hope*, he identifies a pattern that he believes constitutes: a “cruel optimism” for blacks, as it bundles certain promises about redress, equality, freedom, justice, and progress into a political object that always lies beyond reach.

This chapter aims to complicate the politics of hope and concomitant Christian moralism that underpins its iterations that prospective nostalgia, in the form of both rainbowism and Afrofuturism, relies on this for its coherence. In chapter four, I pointed out how Boym's characterisation of nostalgia can be applicable to South Africa's post-1994 regime change. Boym (2001) defines nostalgia as both retrospective and prospective. The nostalgia that is the subject of critique in this section is the prospective type; a restorative nostalgia, which I argue, takes form in the national narrative of rainbow nationalism, also known as rainbowism¹³⁸. The etymological root of the word is in the Greek *nostos* (homecoming) + *algia* (pain). Restorative nostalgia dwells in the *nostos*, whereas reflective nostalgia stresses the *algia*. Boym (2001: xviii) makes the distinction:

Here two kinds of nostalgia are distinguished: the restorative and the reflective. Restorative nostalgia stresses *nostos* and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home. Reflective nostalgia thrives in *algia*, the longing itself and delays the homecoming wistfully, ironically, desperately. Restorative nostalgia does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition.

Restorative nostalgia is a collective, institutionalised form of nostalgia and this type of nostalgia relevant to my argument in so far as it has utility in the construction of the national meta-narrative of rainbow nationalism. For further contextual clarity, we may begin by considering Derek Hook's (2014) essay "Screened History", where he reads nostalgia psychoanalytically as a defensive formation. From this perspective, nostalgia has a narcissistic dimension, as it operates in defence of the white ego ideal. For individuals and groups, for instance in conservative white South Africa, whose image inevitably comes under scrutiny, during the transition, nostalgia has been a mechanism that preserves a likable self-image. For those who may resist what they perceive as change, nostalgia is a mode of self-protection that permits one to idealize oneself (Hook 2014:178). Nostalgia becomes useful as an ego comforter, a protective device that screens history,

¹³⁸ In the Future of Nostalgia, Svetlana Boym (2001) distinguishes between restorative nostalgia and reflective nostalgia.

by preserving selected elements of the past while enabling a structured forgetting of others (Hook 2014). From this point of view, we may start to see how this structured forgetting is continuous, with an amnesiac white collective unconscious as to the manner that it is played out through the ideology of rainbow nationalism. It is important to keep in mind how, in the first instance; rainbow nationalism is seen as an ‘anti-racist’ counter myth to the Afrikaner nationalism, which sought to exclude the majority. While this may seem attractive to an eager black class desiring inclusion, there is an ominous catch. Rainbow nationalism enters as a heroic unifier that preaches transcendence, transcending difference or better yet being equal in diversity and differences in order coexist in peace and harmony (Gqola 2001:99). This transcendence necessitates a structural forgetting of an ongoing pain, which is seen as a baggage of the past that hinders progress and forward movement into the post-racial future.

More importantly, rainbowism is the first form of a South African nationalism that purports to be inclusive of the previously excluded blacks. In other words, if we start to understand rainbow nationalism as a restorative nostalgia that attempts to rebuild a lost home, to be a homecoming, it then follows that in order to access it and enjoy their newly minted democratic citizenship, they (black people), must leave their (pain) baggage at the door. In this way, the ongoing injuries of apartheid are understated, invisibilised and disavowed as belonging in the past as oppose to being ongoing. How can there be redress if there is no wound? The unifying performative gesture that is required closely resembles the phenomenon of “Suffering and Smiling” that I unpack in the previous chapter. The sadomasochistic dimension of this contract cannot be overstated. Put differently, in order to stake a desirable future the repression of the ongoing trauma of black pain is a prerequisite. One can only imagine the scale of rage and trauma that people carry around as fulfilment of this contract. Further, I am emphasising that restorative nostalgia, particularly in its

prospective dimensions, is an affect that often plays a critical role for nation building purposes¹³⁹.

Boym (2001:13) clarifies that:

Unlike melancholia, which confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness, nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory.

It is precisely the rhetoric of rainbow nationalism that dubs South Africa as a miracle nation¹⁴⁰: this becomes a trademark, a nation-building tag line representing the nation's aspirations. However, following a Freudian narrative, what is repressed will always return to haunt the body politic spectacularly (Fick 2015)¹⁴¹.

6. SOUTH AFRICAN EXCEPTIONALISM AS A NOSTALGIA FOR THE FUTURE

What is ominous about South Africa's post-racial exceptionalism is how it is able to automatically refurbish and recycle the image of Africa as undesirable, both in its nostalgia for the past and in its nostalgia for the future. As Zauiddin Sadar (2013:23) states in his text *Future: All that Matters*, "The future is not immune from colonization". Kodwo Eshun (2003: 289) elaborates on this aspect:

The powerful employ futurists and draw power from the futures they endorse, thereby condemning the disempowered to live in the past. The present moment is stretching, slipping for some into yesterday, reaching for others into tomorrow.

South Africa has wrestled with an ominous nostalgia for the past and the future, which on both fronts desires to negate Africa, particularly a sub-Saharan Africa, by relegating it into the realm of the pathological. These desires and sentiments are articulated ad nauseam in public opinion and on various platforms; in every critique of corruption, maladministration, bad governance, or a

¹³⁹ Recently, in 2016, the world witnessed the deep-seated nostalgia that was unearthed by Donald Trump's "Make America great again" campaign, a runaway success.

¹⁴⁰ The catch 22 of this dilemma is captured by the poet Kgafela Magogodi: in deep frustration towards the arts, he remarks, "We are told that this is a county of miracles—the miracle of the birth of a rainbow nation. I wonder. Perhaps the greatest miracle in this country is how we have made silence an industry [...] people see things, they do not talk about them, and they get rewarded for their silence. When you look in the arts, the voices that are promoted are those that buy into this paradigm of a rainbow nation, which is really incarcerating because you cannot go in there with everything. You have to leave some things behind and be nice. That is what the rainbow thing is about. It is about making pleasant gestures. If your art has rough edges to it or recalls things that people want to drop off the national agenda, if your art operates outside of special containers, there is a problem." (Kgafela Oa Magogodi in McCluskey 2009:98-99)

¹⁴¹ See Angelo Fick's (2015) article, "Six feet of the country: the return of the repressed in South Africa". Available on <https://www.enca.com/opinion/six-feet-country-return-repressed-south-africa>. Accessed on 12 November 2017.

crumbling economy, the phobic image of Africa is never out of reach – it looms large as a threatening future, a bogeyman that citizens are encouraged to loathe and organise against. At worst, the aggregation of these phobic images of Africa indirectly galvanises a cycle of Afrophobic violence against African nationals.

South Africa has come to embrace, not only on the African stage but also on the world stage, a latent pride in the perception that it is not quite like other African countries. This begins in part because South Africa is seen by the world as having peacefully unhooked itself from the talons of a racist regime; in fact, the founding myth of a post-apartheid democratic South Africa is its post-racial exceptionalism¹⁴², whose image I argue relies on a familiar clean separation from the rest of the continent. It is as if South Africa's collective unconscious yearns for a South Africa that is geographically severed from Africa so as to give coherence to its collective ambition of being globally lauded as a modern progressive state, by which logic 'the rest of Africa', black Africa, to be specific, would be its antithesis. One picks up these inflections in various mainstream media outlets whose rhetoric reeks of latent yearnings for an anti-African future¹⁴³; I argue that these sentiments are a continuance of the blinkered vision of rainbowism. Mahmood Mamdani (1993:13) was able to detect a dormant anti-Africanism back in 1992 at the University of Cape Town, where he wrote:

In the midst of all the talk of a transition to a 'new' South Africa ... I have found researchers across the board, with always a few notable exceptions, sharing the myopic vision that South Africa is a member of the white industrialized world, except with a large poor population. In discussions that explore a possible future, whether for education or the economy, I have found constant references to Western Europe or North America, at most Australia, as models of a 'new' South Africa. But, viewed from the point of view of the totality

¹⁴² Mamdani (1993) states that, while geographically located at the southernmost tip of Africa, part of South Africa's gloss is its fiercely defended status of not really being like other "African" countries. "South Africa is somehow more akin to a Southern European or Latin American country given its relative levels of industrialization, and now increasingly of liberal democracy."

¹⁴³ See Prince Mashele's "South Africa just another African Country – tell the clever blacks", accessed at <http://www.biznews.com/africa/2016/12/22/south-africa-will-finally-be-an-african-country/2016> and in an interview with Leanne Manas SABC morning live show, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e29zkgBG6lY>

of the South African population, South Africa is not an industrialized European country, but a developing African country with a minority whose European living standards are at the expense of the majority whose living circumstances are more African than anything else. For those who cannot do without a European parallel, South Africa resembles more Hungary or Czechoslovakia, than it does a Western European country (Mamdani 1993:13).

These sentiments and beliefs as outlined by Mamdani, characterise a colonial psychosocial schema that has a hegemonic presence, which has been projected into the post-apartheid future. Matsinhe (2011), in his article “Africa’s Fear of Itself”, traces this idea back to Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*; here he reflects on self-destruction as a logical outcome of the colonised self. This self-destruction is as a result of what Fanon describes as a negrophobogenesis that encourages colonial subjects, black South Africa in this case, to idealise themselves in the image of the coloniser, in other words it is the internalisation of the white ego ideal. Colonial aggrandisement relies on the internalisation of the myth that colonisation and apartheid were magnanimous civilising projects that brought the natives closer to the human ideal. According to Matsinhe (2011), the “we” image of South Africa is synonymous with whiteness as it is synonymous with being Human.

Therefore it follows, in the words of Fanon (2008:148) that “I distrust what is black in me, that is, the whole of my being”, and further that “In self-loathing, the self-loathers also loathe those who resemble and mirror them the most”; this self-loathing then dovetails into a racist phobic fantasy that invisibilises the structure of white culpability. In South Africa, this fantasy has come to fruition many times, lately in the form of an Afrophobia that is regularly conflated with xenophobia, while it is African nationals, mainly poor Africans that suffer the fate of this antagonism. What this conflation simultaneously avoids is a direct confrontation with the antiblack underpinnings of xenophobia in South Africa.

Now, having outlined this backdrop, I would like to draw attention to the work of a Zimbabwean-born artist, Gerald Machona, whose work in Figure 6, *Vabvakure: The People of Far Away* (2013) is a response to the Afrophobic episodic attacks that continue to rupture South African public space (Machona 2013:2). Machona uses Afrofuturistic tropes in order to comment on the estrangement, alienation and ‘othering’ of African people in South Africa, as indicated by his title, Vabvakure, that translates to “the people from far away” in Shona. From the title, *Vabvakure: The People of Far Away*, it becomes immediately clear that the “far away” that is evoked is a place different from here. He made this work whilst living in South Africa, and the notion of here and far away in many ways speaks to a perceived spatio-temporal gap: a dichotomous tension between the here of South Africa and the there/elsewhere of Africa is alluded to. Here, I am speaking less about Africa as a material geographic space, and more about Africa’s psychic place within the collective imaginary in South Africa and the world. I am acutely aware that Africa is complex and diverse, and I use this term in its general problematic state only to convey how it is registered in South Africa’s collective unconscious.



Figure 6. Gerald Machona, *Vabvakure (People from far away)*, 2014

The film *Vabvakure* opens with a camera panning across an endless stretch of a yellow-ochre desert; then a lonely shoe enters the frame. An astronaut's boot is discarded on the sand, suggesting a crash landing; we are quickly confronted with a figure in a patterned space suit lying sideways on the desert floor. Then a woman's voice breaks out in song, and the astronaut's hands twitch rhythmically to the inflections of the song. "All I need is to be free," the woman sings, and this song seems to waken the figure out of unconsciousness. The suited figure rises up to his feet; fully up, he staggers as he attempts to find his bearings; a flurry of drumming picks up from where the voice dissolved. The drumming creates a fast tempo as the astronaut moves in steady coordination with the beat; he provocatively kicks up grains of sand into the camera's lens as he breaks into a seductive dance sequence. The dance enacted by the Afonaut protagonist in the film derives from Malawi: the Chewa initiates perform it as a part of their initiation ritual. While growing up in Zimbabwe, the artist as a young boy was a regular spectator of the dance events often performed by Malawian migrants in Zimbabwe, who were interestingly referred to at the time by the Shona-speaking residents as *Vabvakure*, and they were generally treated as unwanted outsiders. In his MFA thesis, Machona (2013:15) explains in his own words that:

My art practice thus became strongly influenced by these events and drawing parallels between the Chewa people's experience of 'foreignness' in Zimbabwe and my own position as an 'alien' living in South Africa; it seemed appropriate to adopt the performance strategies used in the Nyau ¹⁴⁴in addressing the xenophobic tension present in South African society.

As a child growing up in Zimbabwe, Machona would not have imagined that this curious dance unfolding in front of his young eyes was in fact a warm-up, or better yet an initiation and conduit into a future role he would be coerced into inhabiting in South Africa, as we see him perform it on the other side of the screen. Machona uses sci-fi Afro-futuristic tropes in combination

¹⁴⁴ The word *Nyau* is a Chewa word that translates to mask in the English language. *Nyau*, a masked spectacle originating from Malawi, associated with the Chewa ethnic group found in Southern and Central Africa., (Chikuta, Guhrs and Mtonga 2007: 179). According to Machona (2013) in its migratory form the *Nyau* performance was used by the Chewa people to challenge xenophobic attitudes and actions directed at them due to their 'foreignness' while living in Zimbabwe.

with magic realism in order to make commentary on the cycle of alterity and antiblack abjection that continues to haunt and stifle movement towards the future¹⁴⁵. The compromise of an African future relies on the exceptionalist desires of South African whiteness, which has historically never been genuinely interested in an African future so long as it can recycle its position of power as master.

Whilst violence is perpetuated by blacks onto other blacks colonially divided along the lines of citizenship, nationality and ethnicity, this is not a new phenomenon. The violence is a form of self-erasure, a self-annihilation, that vindicates Lewis Gordon's (1995: 111)¹⁴⁶ point that:

... in an antiblack world only a black can be regarded as an inferior to another black. Thus to be seen as superior requires from this distorted perspective, black suffering and so the other black must be punished at all costs because he carries in his gaze the powerful truth.

I propose that this powerful truth is carried within the dance performed by the Malawian migrants in Zimbabwe, doubled by Machona at the beginning of the film; it can be interpreted as a mirror image that says, "You are one of us, we are the same". The same can be argued in South Africa, where Machona re-enacts this dance as a *Vabvakure* or as a *Kwerekwere* – a derogatory name used to describe foreigners who are black, African foreigners to be exact. The opposite is true for "white foreigners", since no foreigner has ever been mistakenly detained and deported for being fair-skinned and white in South Africa (Matsinhe 2011). The question of an Afro-futurity, then, invites us to think about its possibilities and limits amidst the urgency of Afrophobia; an Afrophobia that by design legitimises the comforts of whiteness and its related pigmentocratic regime. South Africa's collective consciousness continues to be haunted by the ghosts of apartheid

¹⁴⁵ Advocates of rainbowism and the avid rhetoric of post-racialism.

¹⁴⁶ Lewis Gordon (1995), in his article "Critical mixed raced theory", puts forward the thesis that there is no way to reject the principle that there is something wrong with being black beyond the willingness to be black.

that desire a stake in the future. In the words of Jared Sexton (2014:4), “How do we begin to deal with a history that refuses to stay in the past?”

The recycled context of racial inequality in South Africa ensures that black/African subjects are vulnerable to perpetual violence and abjection in tandem with the ideology of amnesia and post-racialism perpetuated by the post-apartheid ideology of rainbowism. It is worth recalling that South Africa, during the grand stage of apartheid, was a place where blacks had no citizenship; as Ndumiso Dladla (2017) elaborates, the construction of the Bantustans was a project based on the “decitizenisation” of blacks. Blacks could only call home the rural poverty-stricken homelands such as Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, etc. South Africa was defined precisely as a white man’s country, which blacks lately have been simply added. Interviewed at a local home affairs office in Johannesburg in 1986, Samson Mogale, a black South African, gushes at the near prospect of becoming a full subject (Mogale in Parks 1986):

“I am about to become a person, a real person,” Mogale, 32, a shipping clerk, said. “For the first time, I will be legal, a citizen in my own country ... Well, maybe not a full citizen, like a white man, that is, but some kind of citizen.”

Whites, Indians and Coloureds were designated a curiously-named document called “The Book of Life”¹⁴⁷, whereas blacks officially existed as *personae non gratae*, as aliens, as the very *Vabvakure*

In addition, *Kwerekwere* which they project onto black Africans as an exercise in their new citizenship.

6.1 THE AESTHETICS OF AFROFUTURISM AND AFROPHOBIA

The coupling of the terms technology and Africa seem like an oxymoron. The idea of an African technology lacks credibility, because the prevailing belief is that Africa has little or nothing to

¹⁴⁷ According to Breckenridge (2014) The Book of Life was an international project, managed by IBM to build a centralised population register. Where Africans were subject to the bureaucratic ordeals of the *dompas* – the despised passbook – everyone else was allocated to Verwoerdian, racial categories emblazoned in the Book of Life.

offer in terms of science and technology. This can be attributed to how, consciously and unconsciously, Africa remains the lack¹⁴⁸ by which the world needs to measure its own progress and development. This perception reinforces what Alondra Nelson describes as this “myth of black disingenuity with technology”, which obscures “the centrality of black people’s labour in modernization ... as well as the historical truths of black participation in technological development” (Nelson 2002:6). In her book *Afrofuturism*, Alondra Nelson (2002:6) states that a digital divide reinforces an old aesthetic paradigm that permanently locks Africa and people of African descent in the “primitive past”, in contrast to modern technology which is used as a yardstick of progress and the future that Africans are always catching up to. Thus, the cultural phenomenon of Afrofuturism optimistically justifies itself as a remedial strategy against a stereotypical paradigm of black backwardness.

The term “Afrofuturism” came to prominence in 1994 in the text “Black to the Future”, an interview conducted by Mark Dery with Samuel Delany, Greg Tate and Tricia Rose (Stuttgen 2014:103). The overarching concern premised by the critics explores why science fiction remains marginal and esoteric as an expressive mode in African American culture, particularly when one considers that, according to Dery, black people “in America and the diaspora are descendants of alien abductees, who subsequently have come to inhabit a sci-fi nightmare” (Dery 1994:180). To bring better clarity to this relation, I believe it is necessary to emphasise the old link between the emergence of the genre of science fiction and the organising principles of colonialism. John Rieder’s (2008) *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* is a text that pertinently links the emergence of this genre to the relations that emerge from middle passage slavery and imperialism¹⁴⁹. In suggesting that an imperial structure of knowledge and power produces science

¹⁴⁸ The idea of Africa representing a technological lack is a necessary myth that mystifies the indispensability of Africa’s mineral resources in the digital age. Cell phones, laptops, PlayStation and Xboxes, like many other electronic devices, are built with capacitors, which require tantalum extracted from coltan. Eighty percent of the world’s coltan supply is mined in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Stanford 2013).

¹⁴⁹ Rieder locates the coalescing of science fiction as a genre during the period of colonial expansion in the late nineteenth century. Sci-fi “comes into visibility,” he argues, “first in those countries most heavily involved in imperialist projects, France and England,” and then gradually gains a foothold in Germany and the U.S. as those countries to

fiction, Rieder (2008) understands colonialism as internal to the genre of science fiction. For instance, think of the exoticising aesthetics of temporality and alterity that I discuss in chapter two.

Rieder (2008:4) further notes that it is precisely the colonial gaze that produces this relation:

The double-edged effect of the exotic – as a means of gratifying familiar appetites and as a challenge to one’s sense of the proper or the natural – pervades early science fiction.

Furthermore, Rieder (2008:68) notes that this is evident in the manner that the exotic “other” is created only as a “distorted projection of the observer”. Rieder points out how despite the fact that slavery has always existed in the world, for instance in classical Europe and in early Africa, what makes the middle passage catastrophically transformative is the epidermal mark of inferiority that it centralises. In other words, the captors and the world locate the status of slavery on the epidermal, where it is permanently and “naturally” marked¹⁵⁰ on Africans. I will get back to this point later in my argument on Afrophobia. According to Berlatsky (2014), a conventional narrative plot in a science fiction visual text imagines the colonisation and destruction of the West. Moreover, it acutely visualises the subjugation of white people, a reverse colonialism by an alien race or an army of robots that turn on their masters. These easy metaphors can stand for the latent threat of an imagined vengeance executed by black subjects. This narrative plot recycles the real events of imperialism that have ended indigenous populations through their contact with Western Europe. The reproduction of this plot in sci-fi material can be interpreted as a critique of a progressive linearity that structures the logic modern temporality. To quote Berlatsky (2014):

Science fiction, then, does not just demonstrate future possibilities, but future limits—the extent to which dreams of what we will do remain captive to the things we have already done.

move to obtain colonies and gain imperial conquests. He adds “Most important, no informed reader can doubt that allusions to colonial history and situations are ubiquitous features of early science fiction motifs and plots.” (Rieder in Berlatsky 2014).

¹⁵⁰ Although Rieder (2012) does not chase this thought to its logical conclusion, this is precisely where Afropessimism, by way of Orlando Patterson’s (1982) text *Slavery and Social Death*, stakes its claim that slavery ought to be understood less as experiential and more as an ontological relation of social death, which cannot be disimbricated from blackness.

It is from this angle that my critique of the “futurity” in Afrofuturism gains its traction. The conventional appeal of Afrofuturism, and its underlying escapist ideology of *hope*, seeks to transcend (with imagination) the antiblackness that structures global civil society by carving out an otherworldly utopia, or Afrotopia to be precise. In its use of certain visual tropes, Afrofuturism nostalgically yearns for a time out of time, as we know it. From this perspective one can identify how Afrofuturism, as a liberatory gesture, can be co-opted into a safely packaged “feel-good” post-racial¹⁵¹, multiculturalist paradigm as it was the case with block buster afrofuturistic sci-fi movie *Black Panther*

In its liberatory postures, the celebratory rhetoric of Afrofuturism promises that antiblackness is an overcomeable feat, if we only just apply our minds and imaginations properly. My argument is not so much interested in that agenda; rather I argue that the power of Afrofuturism resides in the visual metaphors that it provides in relation to the category of the human. This aspect is aptly captured by *No Humans Involved*¹⁵², an exhibition that I saw when I visited the Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam in July 2015. The exhibition was comprised of a multimedia installation by the multidisciplinary collective called HOWDOYOUSAYYAMINAFRICAN. whose work in the exhibition centred on the following premise¹⁵³:

NO HUMANS INVOLVED (N.H.I.) is a meditative interrogation of the philosophical, social and institutional conditions that have outlined the parameters for the category “human” within Western discourses. In N.H.I., the collective deeply investigates the non-representability of the black body, the possibility of knowledge production outside of the canon of Modernity and the potential of collectivity as a vehicle

151 The post-racial dynamic in art practice was to a degree expressed through the post-black art exhibition ‘Freestyle’ curated by Thelma Golden at the studio museum in 2001. *Freestyle* was an exhibition that included twenty-eight up and coming African American artists who were “adamant about not being labeled ‘black’ artists, though their work was steeped, in fact deeply interested, in redefining complex notions of blackness”. According to Glen Ligon, post-black art came out of the era of High Multiculturalism. Glen Ligon expresses this in a published conversation with the art historian Huey Copeland (2009). Available online ://www.liverpool.ac.uk/media/livacuk/csis-2/blackatlantic/research/Copeland_text_defined.pdf accessed on the 17th September 2020

152 This title refers to an article written by Sylvia Wynter (1994), “No Humans Involved: An open letter to my colleagues”. NHI, “no humans involved”, is a term regularly used by the police in the US to refer to crimes committed against people who are deemed as undesirables, such as prostitutes and gang members, but mainly blacks.

153 The exhibition catalogue, “NO HUMANS INVOLVED a collective exhibition of HOWDOYOUSAYYAMINAFRICAN?” is available on http://www.wdw.nl/en/our_program/exhibitions/no_humans_involved. Accessed on 12 November 2017.

through which an unencumbered aesthetics of Blackness might be explored (Adusei-Poku and Bell 2015:5).

The exhibition itself was comprised of video vignettes, sculptural installations and soundscapes. Interestingly, in a symposium that accompanied the exhibit, Kara Keeling presented a paper on the spatio-temporal logics of black non-existence. In her presentation, Keeling focused on Sun Ra's¹⁵⁴ (1974) canonical Afrofuturistic film, *Space is the Place* (Figure 6.1).

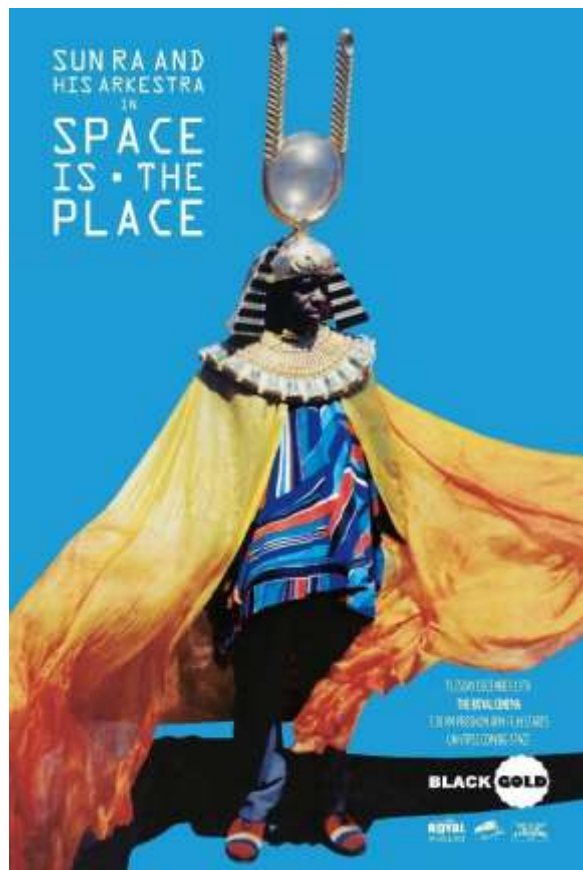


Figure 6.1. Sun Ra, *Space is the Place*, 1974

¹⁵⁴ Sun Ra is considered as one of the founding fathers of Afrofuturism. Sun Ra is a composer and performer of free jazz, what he called 'cosmic jazz'. Ra performances were underpinned by a philosophy that was illustrated by combining Afrocentric images from the past and the future, a black science fiction that would later be called Afrofuturism (Stuttgen 2014:96).



Figure 6.2. Sun Ra, *Space is the Place*, 1974

Sun Ra is a famous jazz composer and performer whose repertoires were informed by a black Afrocentric philosophy that sought to connect an ancient African past to the future, through music (Stuttgen 2014:98). It is through his interest in Egyptology that he developed a strong connection with its legends and the gods such as King Tutankhamun and Ra of Heliopolis, the Egyptian sun god, from whom he borrows his name (Szwed in Stuttgen 2014:95). Often his attire and dress sense reflected this Afrocentric philosophy.

In his film, *Space is the Place*, there is a segment where Sun Ra is mocked by a group of black youths for his “outlandish” attire and claims of being from outer space; they ridicule him for his eccentric attire, asking him: “How do we know you are for real? How do we know you are not some hippy or something? What is up with your funny clothes? Are you for real?” They laugh openly. Sun Ra calmly responds:

How do you know I am real? I am not real, I am just like you. You do not exist in this society, if you did, your people would not be seeking rights. You are not real, if you were real, you would have status amongst nations in the world. So we are both myths, I do not come to you as reality; I come to you as myth because that what black people are.

This scene from Sun Ra's film *Space is the Place*¹⁵⁵ captures the antipode between the humans rather convincingly. Sun Ra appears as spectre to his audience; he arrives as spirit with a message from the ancestors that he has to come impart to the black youth. Sun Ra's appearance invites scorn, like the unwanted black migrants in Zimbabwe, who through the enchanting dance convey a premonition about young Gerald Machona's near future; a premonition that regrettably comes into fruition via the Afrophobic future that awaits him in South Africa, where he currently lives as part of the Zimbabwean diaspora. It is from this point of view that we may begin to understand Afrofuturism's criticality in relation to the category of humanity. Kodwo Eshun (1998:192) remarks that, from an Afrofuturistic perspective, humanity is a treacherous category. The power of Afrofuturism, in its iconographic signifiers, has the signifying capacity to visually portray the intersectional qualities of the anti-human, pre-human and post-human, and the various forms with which they coalesce into blackness. What has been less emphasised is how post-apartheid Afrophobia relies on the epidermal schema of black pathology as its organising principle. It is a corporeal schema in which white South Africans obviously sit at the apex, unscathed.

It is within the context I have outlined that I would like to further draw attention to the death of the Mozambican national Ernesto Nhamuave, who was engulfed in flames after having been set alight by an angry mob at the Ramaphosa Township in the East Rand, Gauteng. Only amnesia permits one to forget that the ranking of poor blacks and Africans alongside vermin is not strange nor bizarre. The visual association of blackness and pathology affirms something that viewers consciously and subconsciously know about the status of black bodies; that is, they are the phobogenic objects of Frantz Fanon's meditations. This image of the burning man displayed beside the one of a cockroach articulates a naturalised union that not only affirms the ongoing

¹⁵⁵<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSNvdLpLx-0>

killability of blacks in post-Marikana South Africa, but also the ignorability of their deaths¹⁵⁶. It is worth noting that this juxtaposition between the cockroach and Nhamuave's immolated body harks back to the genocidal rhetoric of Rwanda in 1994. The targeted Tutsis were equated to vermin in order to naturalise and justify the mass killings. As rainbowism was being birthed, a spectacle of death was ensuing in Central Africa; this genocide was largely ignored by the world's media because it occurred concurrently with South Africa's first democratic elections.

The easy use of this image as a front page logo for an arts festival also speaks about the aesthetic productivity of Fanon's faithful imago re-emerging as a brand for an arts festival in Cape Town. Machona's visual treatment of Afrophobia–xenophobia, like the dominant discourse that surrounds it, avoids addressing Afrophobia from below the surface; in other words, in its antiblack underpinnings, it is a handling that shies away from delving into the depths of an antiblack phobogenic reality, which centres and gives gravitas to Afrophobia.

6.2 ON *NACHTRÄGLICHKEIT*: POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA AS APARTHEID'S DEFERRED ACTION

If we are to understand the post-apartheid advent of Afrophobia and its concomitant uptake in the visuality of the post-apartheid black body politic, it may be vital that we turn to the concept of *Nachträglichkeit*. In the essay "Screened History: Nostalgia as Defensive Formation", Derek Hook (2012) invites us to think through this concept in order to better grasp the nuance of present condition. *Nachträglichkeit* is a German word that can be translated into English as "afterwardsness". It is used in Freudian psychoanalysis in order to refer to a mode of belated understanding or retroactive attribution of a traumatic meaning to earlier events. It can be translated to deferred action or retroaction. The concept of *Nachträglichkeit* can be understood as the happening of a traumatic event (a pathogenic effect) that occurs but is not realised at the

¹⁵⁶ I borrow this term from Steve Martinot and Jared Sexton (2003). In their article "The Avant-Garde of White Supremacy", they argue that the ignorability of Black Death and the impunity of police who murder black bodies form the constitutive background for the symbolic rationality of the white democracy.

same time. Put in simpler words; imagine “a seed that has been planted that will flower later, the germination of the seed is reliant upon a subsequent event” (Hook 2014:186). Therefore, *Nachträglichkeit*, or afterwardsness, can refer to a stage of materialisation of something that was inculcated before. It is somewhat the return of the repressed. Thus, to speak about *Nachträglichkeit* is to speak of apartheid history as not fully resolved. In this way the post-apartheid becomes apartheid’s deferred impact; in other words, it is the fruition of the apartheid condition, as opposed to the commonly accepted idea of the post-apartheid as a time of radical change. This idea brings to mind Saidiya Hartman’s injunction in *Scenes of Subjection* (1997:171), she suggests that we think differently about the vent of the emancipation of slaves. She commands that the language of freedom that is used to articulate the reconstruction period, in other words the post-emancipation period, should be considered as a site of *elaboration rather than transformation*. From this thought pattern, we may think of the post-apartheid as a transition of one mode of domination to another. The seeds of apartheid’s afterlife sprout in rainbowism’s nostalgia and its concomitant Trojan horse antiblack Afrophobia.

6.3 THE QUESTION OF THE END OF THE WORLD

With the increasing scholarship on the climate crises in the form of the Anthropocene¹⁵⁷, the question of the end of the world¹⁵⁸ as we know it is becoming less esoteric and more popular and palpable. Theories of the end of the world¹⁵⁹, are as old as the world as the itself. However my

¹⁵⁷ According to T. J. Demos’s (2017) in his book *Against the Anthropocene: Visual Culture and the Environment Today*, he describes the Anthropocene as a geological epoch that began and grew concurrently with the industrial revolution. Although there are contesting scientific accounts that date it back before that, basically there is a lack consensus about when this ecological and geological crises began, however similar to Demos, in the interests of my argument, I lean towards the research argument that it “began in 1492 with the arrival of the Europeans in the Americas, initiating a massive rearrangement of life on earth” in Demos’ words (2017:8). From this perspective the Anthropocene is inaugurated and catalysed by the suffering and death that sustains the modern capitalist system that is “founded upon imperial conquest” and racial slavery.

¹⁵⁸ See Rafael Winkler’s (2019) “The end of the world is nigh-but we can stop it” published in the *Mail & Guardian*. <https://mg.co.za/article/2019-10-02-00-the-end-of-the-world-is-nigh-but-we-can-stop-it>. Accessed on the 20th of November 2019

See Harry Cockburn’s (2019) “High likelihood of human civilisation coming to end’ by 2050, report finds” published in the Independent. <https://www.independent.co.uk/environment/climate-change-global-warming-end-human-civilisation-research-a8943531.html>. Accessed on 18 September 2019.

¹⁵⁹ It is insufficient to dismiss the desire to end an antiblack world on the basis that there have been failed revolutions in the past. Furthermore the question of social death, as mode of suffering, as far as I know has not previously not been explicitly linked to antiblackness prior to the intellectual advent of Afropessimism and I stand to be corrected here

interest this section is linked to how it is evoked in the genre of science fiction, in Afro-futurism to be specific. Science fiction is a genre of representation that depends on the visual signifiers that bring to light the question of the end of the world through imperial conquest and John Reider (2008) argues this angle in *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* and this is not a gratuitous argument.

The thesis that colonialism is a significant historical context for early science fiction is not an extravagant one. Indeed its strong foundations in the obvious has been well recognized by scholars of science fiction. Most historians of science fiction agree that utopian and satirical representations of encounters between European travellers and non-Europeans-such as Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), Cyrano's *Comical History* and Jonathan Swift's *Gullivers Travels* (1726)-form a major part of the genre's prehistory. Scholars largely (though not universally) agree that the period of the most fervid imperialist expansion in the late nineteenth century is also a crucial period for the emergence of the genre...Science fiction comes into visibility first in those countries heavily involved in imperialist projects- France, England and then gains popularity in the United States, Germany, Russia as those countries also enter into more and more imperialist competition (Csicsery-Ronay 23). Most importantly, no informed reader can doubt that allusions to colonial history and situations are ubiquitous features of early science fiction motifs (Reider 2008:3).

If it is a widely established fact that early science fiction is an ideological topsy-turvy, that appropriates from real world nineteenth century imperial encounters that happen concurrently to its emergence, then what science fiction does is to imagine the western world as the future victims of an exotic, otherworldly imperial force that brings the world to its end. What this means, in essence is that the white western subjects shortly and imaginatively position themselves in the place of the enslaved and the colonised. This is a violent condition appropriated as fantasy. A reality that Africans, at the time had already come to know through racial slavery and the coloniality.

These violent encounters and processes are not just imagined through the colonial gaze of early sci-fi as Reider (2008) argues throughout the book. For the purpose of this discussion, I would like to think about how the colonial encounter reinvigorates visual tropes of the “end of the world”. At their fullest expression, racial slavery and colonialism do in fact bring “end of the world” like consequence to the genocide, the enslaved and the colonised. On the other side of the coin, the inverse to say that it also birthed a new world, which through the lenses of Afropessimist thought, this world would be described as an antiblack world¹⁶⁰, on both sides of the Atlantic ocean. As Saidiya Hartman (2008:57) suggests in *lose Your Mother* that in the afterlife of slavery, “Black life was even more expendable in Africa than the United States; only the particulars varied.”

If it is agreed upon that the world that racial slavery births is antiblack; then the genre of Afrofuturism disinvests from this world, as we know it, as it imagines escapist black futures where “Space is the Place”. Afro-futurism satisfies the desire for fugitivity, the desire to take flight a hope and wish for a black futurity that is contradistinct from the antiblackness that gives coherence to the structure of the present world (Quan 2017:184). It beckons us to imagine possible futures beyond the realms of the existing world we occupy today. Afrofuturism is a method of thinking and an imagining that attempts to think beyond or to transcend global anti-blackness and its commonsenses.

The point I am making here is that the visual language of Afrofuturism and its yearnings to escape the antiblack world point to the idea that it is the world itself that is contaminated by antiblackness. The destruction of images that mirror the pathologies of this world is not the solution. My angle here is not so much about destroying the black visual archive (specifically the images that I have chosen to analyse which I argue reproduce an antiblack identity formation). I

¹⁶⁰ It is insufficient to dismiss the desire to end an antiblack world on the basis that there have been failed revolutions in the past. Furthermore the question of social death, as mode of suffering, as far as I know has not previously not been explicitly linked to antiblackness prior to the intellectual advent of Afropessimism and I stand to be corrected here

am interested in the question of ending the world and the climate that makes these images possible and enjoyable, this is to evoke Christina Sharpe's (2016) question, in *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, where she begs the question, "When the only certainty is the weather that produces a pervasive climate of antiblackness, what must we know in order to move through these environments in which the push is always toward black death.

Why risk the contamination involved in restating the maledictions, obscenities, columns of losses and gains, and measures of value by which captive lives were inscribed and extinguished? Why subject the dead to a second order of violence?...The merchant's account of mortality makes plain the inevitability of the repetition: Melancholy, dysentery, ditto, ditto. Rather than the wasted effort of striking a line through "meagre girl" or a "refuse boy," the ledger introduces another death through this shorthand. In addition, it returns the dead to us "in the very form which they were driven out of the world"

(Saidiya Hartman, *Venus in Two Acts*, 2008)

In grappling with the convergence of terror and pleasure in the libidinal economy of racial slavery and its archive, in her article *Venus in Two Acts* Saidiya Hartman (2008:1) identifies the difficult question of writing at the limit of the unspeakable and the unknown. In the act of narration through her signature method of "critical fabulation", Hartman grapples with redress. If the archive in this context, is a "death sentence, a tomb, a display of the violated body, an inventory of property..." then how might narration and storytelling offer some form of compensation? This question is just as critical to art history and visual culture as it is in literary and written culture from where Hartman poses her question. This is not to say that her theory is limited to the literary dimension, it is not. This is not to say that text is not visual, it is. However, if we must consider the notion that images can signify distinctly from text, then we must be attentive to the meanings that images bring that might be lost in the written medium.

This is a thesis about images and artistic practices that occur within a difficult and tragic visual archive. In this vein, we ought to take seriously Hartman's questions: "Can beauty provide an antidote to dishonour?" What does the open casket disclose and what does looking into the

face of violation and death reveal? For the sake of my argument, I recalibrate this question in order to add onto the enquiry: What does looking affirm? In this thesis I have grappled with the nostalgia that I argue drives the repetitions and returns to the scene. By reading these artistic acts through nostalgia, I am not offering an answer, but rather opening more pathways of meaning; chief amongst them is the intended and unintended sadomasochistic affect, which also visually operates as a form of identity formation. To live in the aftermath of catastrophe is to contend with images, mostly beautiful pictures that are embedded within this affective paradigm. The concept and method of critical fabulation need not stay locked within or in relation to the written archive. Hartman coins the term *critical fabulation* to describe her writing practice, which is a method of writing against the archive. A *fabula* is the structural elements of a narrative, its building blocks. According to Mieke Bal (in Hartman 2008:11) a fabula is:

A series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused and experienced by actors. An event is a transition from one state to another. Actors are agents that perform actions. (They are not necessarily human.) To act is to cause or experience and event.

Using fabulation, with critical intent, Hartman plays with the elements of the story, by representing the sequence of events. She does this in order to displace and throw critical doubt into the authorized account. By doing this she is able to make apparent and visible the structural machinations behind the production of disposable lives in racial slavery as well as in the discipline of history (Hartman 2008:11). By looping and weaving multiple temporalities, Hartman narrates the time of slavery into our present; her critical fabulations bring into light the ongoing traumas that exist in liberal democracy. The *refusal to provide closure* is a requirement of this method, she explains:

It is imperative to respect black noise – the shrieks, the moans, the nonsense and the opacity...the intent of this practice is not

to give voice to the slave, rather to imagine what cannot be verified, a realm of experience which is situated between two zones of death – social and corporeal death – and to reckon with the precarious lives which are visible only in the moment of their disappearance. (Hartman 2008:12)

In reading and writing about archival art practice, what kinds of meaning would the application of critical fabulation produce and affirm? Critical fabulating would recognize the often disavowed elements of defeat and loss, which in turn provide the conditions of possibility “for a repetitive recycling” of these symbolically violent images and their violent contexts from where they emerge. This recycling occurs in different guises, locally and transnationally, in varying degrees. It is a question of degree not category. The selected images from this archive signify “a second order of violence” that flows as the excesses of the gratuitous violence in the world (Hartman 2008:12).

The mere recognition of black loss holds the potential to disabuse us of the lulling and soothing rhetoric of state-sanctioned mythmaking projects such as Rainbowism and colour-blind ideology. As guises of antiblackness they have served to gaslight, mystify and disavow the ongoing black precarity and structural violence that remains meted out against black bodies (even in intra-black spaces), that is, xenophobia-Afrophobia.

Affirming and recognizing elements of defeat and loss, is perhaps to arrive where hope and optimism may lie as bedfellows. This is an important step in criticism and is not so much a stance, but instead a form of recognition that affirms that this is a structural relation, that is indeed ongoing, it recognizes the incomplete project of freedom. The structural antagonism of antiblackness unfolds whether one individually chooses to participate in it or not. In some instances participation is practised as a form of survival, as many people may not have the agency to refuse it; having mentioned this, would refusal be an experimentation with freedom?

Written declarations or visual representations that reject antiblackness do not necessarily make it go away, although I genuinely wish this was the case, and again I say this not to push against Dlamini's happy memories of social life but rather to highlight that that they happen within

an antiblack structural dynamic of apartheid which stays resilient beyond 1994. This thesis does not explicitly nor implicitly call for the banning or the eradication of the selected genre of archival images discussed here.

As previously stated and demonstrated in my analysis, a single image can carry many and contradictory ideas, ambivalences and tensions. Therefore this conclusion does not attempt to tie a neat and perfect bow around complex and contentious concepts and sentiments that contemporary images of nostalgia evoke in South Africa. This thesis has brought to light and has examined these tensions and contradictions that are the implications of nostalgia in contemporary archival art practice. By focusing on imagery that makes a critical commentary on black subjectivity, the thesis brings together a number of theoretical arguments presented by a numerous writers. For instance, Saidiya Hartman (1997) in *Scenes of Subjection* introduces the notion of “the terrible spectacle”: how archival art can be interpreted metaphorically as a site/sight wherein the suffering black body can be consumed. Likewise, in Chapter Five I use the same source to explore the role and limits of empathy, where empathy reinforces erasure of the other, or the cannibalization of the other’s suffering through making their suffering one’s own. Christina Sharpe’s (2016) *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* and her essay in the catalogue *Looking Forward: Looking Black* have been valuable in shaping my understanding of how these selected archival images in their intersections with visual media function as an Althusserian “hail”, that interpellates viewers into certain identity formations.

Nostalgia has noteworthy implications at a formal level, particularly when we consider the technical excellence that underpins mastery in art practice; images in art practice are stereotypically rendered beautiful first. This brings to bear the thorny subject of pleasure and sadomasochism (which is usually unremarked upon) and what to do with it; the default is usually to deny it. I echo Sharpe (1999 :46) “There is definitely a lot of pleasure in their reproducing of

these images; the beauty of the images attests to that.” It is this concept of pleasure, which I draw from David Marriott’s (2017) essay “The Perfect Beauty of Black Death”, that has been useful, particularly where he interrogates the aesthetic uptake of black death and black pain and the various ways that the artistic re-enactment conjures an enjoyment of cruelty.

Derek Hook’s psychoanalytical analysis of post-apartheid’s spatio-temporality has been invaluable, as it speaks to the affective structure of nostalgia. The topic of nostalgia in post-apartheid writing is not new; it has been addressed quite compellingly in literary studies. Beyond the translation of Dlamini’s novel into an exhibition at the Museum of African Design, there has not been any sustained and intensive reading of nostalgia in contemporary art; this is the gap that this thesis fills. Through the analysis of the selected imagery, this thesis provides a unique discussion on the uses of nostalgia both in the apartheid-colonial and post-apartheid/colonial dimensions. The method of reading nostalgia in the visual is both a rare and an unpursued angle in art history and visual scholarship in South Africa. I use the term “archival art” or “archival artists” in this thesis in line with Hal Foster’s (2015) description in *Bad New Days: Art Criticism, Emergency* where he describes archival artists as artists who seek to make present, historical information that is often lost or suppressed:

To this end they [archival artists] elaborate on the devices of the found image, object and text and often favor the installation format as they do so, the non-hierarchical spatiality that they use to advantage ... drawn from archives of mass culture, these sources are familiar enough to ensure a legibility that can be disturbed or redirected (Foster 2015:32)

As previously mentioned I have chosen to focus on the work of artists who foreground the figure of the black body in the visual archive, such as in Ayana V. Jackson’s (2013) *Archival Impulse* and *Poverty Pornography*, Andrew Putter’s (2014) *Native Work* and Bogosi Sekhukhuni’s *Dream Diaries* (2014). The visual motifs and tropes laden in these works are familiar enough to ensure a legibility to a contemporary audience as they reference prior events, they hark back to

racial tropes, racial representations and a conventional politics of representation that remain embedded in public culture and visual representation today.

In the work of Ayana V. Jackson, *Archival Impulse*, the prior event that she draws from extends from the legacy of the human zoo. In her photographs, she restages scenes selected from photographic archives of human zoos, which were also known as ethnological expositions, or as ethnic shows (Blanchard 2008:3). These types of exhibitions occurred during the 19th century in Europe and in America. Ethnological expositions combined an array of functions, in that they operated within multiple dimensions simultaneously. They exhibited “the exotic other”, who were colonized subjects, mainly people of African descent who were seen in the West as “savage”, “strange”, as hybrids of the human and animal. These subjects were exhibited in zoological gardens not just in a manner that heightened their difference, but in ways that reinforced the idea that they were primitives and part of the natural world as opposed to humanity.

These spaces were open not just for public entertainment but were spaces of public knowledge production, where the pursuits of scientific racism emerged; they operate simultaneously as a sight, site and as a cite. Further, the knowledge that was produced from these staged scenes was used to justify at a global scale the political imperial project of Western domination, in the form of enslavement and colonisation. Jackson restages these scenes that she draws from the photographs taken in the human zoo. She performs these scenes with the purpose of seeking new knowledge pertaining to the agency of the original sitters, an agency which she believes is enacted in their performative gestures. In Jackson’s representation of this archive she uses her own body to perform both the role of the sitter and the photographer who is the bearer of this western colonial gaze. However the overarching element in Jackson’s representations of this sordid past is the manner in which her images are rendered beautiful. As Mbembe (2014) describes them in the catalogue, her pictures are “beautiful first”. In other words, they are images about the

past that invite us to appreciate and enjoy them as objects of beauty first; the fact that they come from a painful history of racial subjugation and humiliation becomes secondary.

It is at this point that I insert my critique of nostalgia, in the manner that this historical memory is enacted beautifully, and remembered aesthetically. Nostalgia ordinarily elicits romantic and fond recollections of the past, it sanitizes the past in order to present it as palatable for a contemporary audience. I do not believe that the artist sets out deliberately to achieve this effect and affect, however I do think that the content of her compositions taps into a pre-existing structure of feeling, it evokes the libidinal economy of the “stereotype” where black humiliation and pain is erased or consumed in a sadomasochistic way.

The act of stepping into such roles, I would argue, presents an ambivalence, particularly in the diorama series where she presents herself in the nude as the quintessential “primitive” on display. While on one hand, it can be argued that tackling these stereotypical representations is an act of empowerment in the sense that the artist is taking ownership of this archive. However one cannot shake off the psychological impact of what Jean Cocteau (1999) identifies as the “the space of uncertainty”. This space opens up when black artists assimilate racial stereotypes of “the other”: Jackson describes an inevitable sense of self-degradation and masochism on one hand and on the other a palpable recognition and potential liberation. Perhaps it is this liminal threshold of arriving at an acute awareness of the totality of one’s domination, perhaps it is this tenuous threshold that holds liberatory potential.

For the spectator, the effect depends on who is doing the looking and consuming the spectacle: in the original context of the human zoo, these performances of the black primitive other were carefully curated for a white Euro-American spectatorship. These were sites where the identity construction of whiteness was bolstered; in other words, this is where the construction of the white “self” as modern, civilized and superior was engineered (Blanchard 2008: 40). The legacy of this gaze is consolidated through these dehumanising forms of exhibiting Africans,

aspects of which have remained in public culture. This is not to say that they have remained intact from the time of its inception. However, there are recognisable thematic threads of these stereotypes of “representing the other” that are repeated and can still be identified in contemporary art and visual culture (Blanchard 2008:40). This is a repetition that echoes what Bhabha (1982) describes in “The Other Question: the Stereotype and the Colonial Discourse” as the discursive strategy of the stereotype, which functions as a form of knowledge production and as a form of identification that vacillates between what is always “in place, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated. The repetition of these stereotypes through art practice highlights or brings to the fore what I have argued in this thesis to be an enjoyment of “otherness” and its concomitant antiblackness. Ultimately the aesthetics of these stereotypes, and the manner in which they conjure nostalgia obscures, if not erases, the violence of their origin.

Although the Dutch artist Renzo Martens (2009) is not black or African by any measure, his artwork *Enjoy Poverty* was important to my study because in a clear and blatant way it provides the signifiers and visual metaphors of “poverty pornography” and its consumption in the art world. *Enjoy Poverty* exposes a visual circuit between media images in the form of photojournalism, art production, humanitarianism, liberal globalization and the various ways they continue to circulate and yield profit from black suffering and poverty. *Enjoy Poverty*, although problematic in its methods, opens up a space in which to mount a discussion a flagrant global antiblackness and its regimes of looking that continue to congeal how the image of Africa is read and consumed not just in the media but also in contemporary art practice.

Further, although I could not explore the full scope of these representations within the space of this thesis, I do plan in the future to critically examine *Somnyama Ngonyama*, the latest work of Zanele Muholi (2015) who also appropriates othering stereotypes as an act of empowerment and as an act of claiming her black identity (Mussai:2017). The *Somnyama Ngonyama* series of portraits has been generally framed as an act of resistance against stereotypes as opposed to the

celebration and endorsement of them. Similar to Putter's *Native Work*, her portraits employ pictorial tropes reminiscent of Duggan-Cronin's anthropological photography (Mussai 2017). I think it is important to provide a quote of Muholi's response to this comparison as I believe it speaks to the idea of agency or rather a simulated agency, which I argue is predetermined by the structural dynamic of the white gaze that I discuss in Chapter Five. In response to the Duggan-Cronin comparison, Muholi (2017) asserts that:

In the majority of photographs associated with previous visual anthropology, the subjects have no name. It is only the author – or the so called expert – who has the name and is credited. The subjects are silent, the subjects are doubly brutalized by refusing to name them. Those portraits were based on somebody who at the end of the day equates to nobody. The black body is branded as a product, rather than as something that is lively, or has a life. That's number one; number two, I doubt that the people subjected to visual anthropology understood the intention of the author ... I try to create portraits without hypersexualizing my body, just to say, I have a voice, I have authority and rather autonomy over my anatomy

Muholi draws a careful distinction between the past and the present. She draws a line between the objectifying legacy of visual anthropology portraits and her new and empowering contemporary interventions, such as naming the portraits and doing her best not to sexualize herself. This is similar to Jackson's interventions in which she inserts in the caption of her photographs a dialogue between the sitter and the photographer. For instance Figure 7, *Dress my hair, drop your chin*, represents the interaction between the sitter and photographer during the photoshoot: these interventions seem like attempts at debunking the idea that sitters have no agency in the production of these pictures.



Figure 6.3. Jackson, V. Ayana. *Dress my hair/ Drop your chin*, 2013

Although Jackson explicitly states that she is not giving agency to the sitters, this strategy of giving captions in the sitter's voice assumes that if the images were read independently, without the caption, they would read differently, which is accurate to a certain extent. Similar to Jackson's strategy, the fact that she is the bearer of the gaze on her own body, that she is both the sitter and the photographer, speaks to the idea of empowerment through self-representation. The colonial mimicry embedded in this type of role play is palpable, where the oppressed take up the position of the oppressor, the colonized mimics the colonizer: in Jackson's photographs she straddles these two positionalities simultaneously. This power dynamic is no different from the highest expression of Foucault's (1977) panopticism where the inmates internalise and re-enact their own subjugation upon themselves. The perfection of power is when a system of discipline is internalized, through

self-regulation, when the subject watches him/herself in a manner that reproduces the same relations of power underpinned by the stereotype.

I believe this is why the first thing that people notice when they see Muholi's portraits is the darkness of her skin (Mussai 2017). It is a familiar stylized shiny darkness that evokes the black polished countenances of the minstrel coon tradition which continues to haunt popular culture in South Africa as well as in the USA where it originates. When asked, Muholi quickly attributes the darkness of her skin to the post-production process of high contrasting. Nonetheless, whether by polish that is manually smeared on the skin or by post-production digital manipulation in order to achieve the dark high contrast, her final images cannot be safely and comfortably divorced and removed from the living legacy of the blackface aesthetic.

There are plenty of artists whose work draws from the archive who I did not discuss at length, however for a future book project I would certainly delve into their work. For instance the performance work of the South African artist Brett Bailey's *Exhibit A, B and C*. In his work he recreates scenes from the human zoo. Unlike Jackson, he does not use his own body as a site of the spectacle, but he actually hires black people to perform the roles of slaves and colonial subjects, slightly similar to Andrew Putter's strategies in *Native Work*, although it is important to note that Putter's work is in conversation with the Duggan-Cronin portraits.

Anton Kannemeyer (2010) is another South African artist whose work *Pappa in Afrika* can be discussed within the theoretical dimensions of nostalgia; his cartoons hark back to Hergé's famous children's cartoon *Tintin in the Congo* first published in the 1930s. In *Tintin in the Congo*, Hergé uses blackface caricature in his formal depiction of the native Congolese as backward, lazy savages in need of European civilization and mastery, which his Belgian protagonist Tintin has arrived in the Congo to benevolently bequeath. Kannemeyer pays homage to Hergé by using the same formal structure of representation in his comic *Pappa in Afrika*; however, his depictions are

motivated by what is framed by Danie Marais¹⁶¹ (2010) as the desire to critique the hypocrisy and racist attitudes of white South Africa; in Kannemeyer's version:

Pappa in Afrika is, above all, an indictment of white liberal bigotry, which is in many ways exemplified by the gap between the soothing sounds of political correctness and the crude stereotypes that still thrive in the twisted nightmares of white fear.

In the above quote, Marais reflects on political correctness as a form of repression exhibited by white South Africans, in particular white liberals, following the official legal dismantling of apartheid. Whereas in the apartheid past there was no need to repress a racist white unconscious, in the post-apartheid context, the advent of political correctness has become a mechanism used to block and repress this aspect. Kannemeyer's comics depict instances when this repression is undone (Hook 2013:189). In Kannemeyer's renderings he packages racist kitsch cartoons into a kid-friendly bite-sized format suggesting the idea that his childhood past was always more racist than it is remembered in the present.

Further, according to Marais (2010) Kannemeyer exposes the racism that propels white fears; for instance the fantasy, or rather the nightmare, where a white woman is gang raped by black men, which is the case in his image *The Liberals*. However, what Marais fails to mention is that such fears and fantasies are not new in the libidinal economy of racist white (un)consciousness that Kannemeyer identifies as repressed through political correctness.

The sadistic lynching of black people in the United States during the reconstruction period that followed the emancipation of slaves was frequently as a result of the false accusations of rape. According to Robert A. Gibson (2018), "The racist myth of Negroes' uncontrollable desire to rape white women acquired a strategic position in the defense of the lynching practice"¹⁶². Lynching in the American South was seen as a form of maintaining social order following the emancipation of

¹⁶¹<https://mg.co.za/article/2010-08-27-denying-the-privileged-a-voice> accessed on 25 May 2018

¹⁶²<http://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/curriculum/units/1979/2/79.02.04.x.html> accessed on 25 May 2018

blacks and it was a direct result of white fears around what was perceived as black progress. One can therefore argue that lynching was a full expression of the desire for a nostalgic return to a time when negroes knew their place. The “Make America Great Again” slogan, was adopted as an apparent counterpoint to the era of Obama, America’s first black president and it can be seen as emerging from a similar nostalgic structure of feeling.

South Africa and the United States have historical similarities and differences that can be analysed comparatively in order to enhance one’s understanding of the post-apartheid moment. In fact, comparative studies that have been made between the two contexts, particularly in the patterns in which in both contexts white supremacy expresses itself.¹⁶³ In the same vein, it could be argued that it manifests in the manner in which black “unfreedoms and their ghosts”¹⁶⁴ rear their ugly heads in the post-apartheid contemporary era. Interestingly, Okwui Enwezor opens his essay “Reframing the Black Subject: Ideology and Fantasy in Contemporary South African Representation” by sketching out comparative, analogous depictions that he identifies as running synchronously through the histories of the United States and South Africa in which he had already picked out elements of this regressive nostalgia for return and repetition in South Africa:

Baas and maasa, kaffir and nigger; the hottentot and the auction block; Jim Crow and apartheid. The uncanny resemblance of these characterisations is not an accident (Enwezor 1999:378)

Enwezor writes this essay as a response to what he can already perceive as a nostalgic structure of feeling taking shape in South Africa’s public life and culture:

Nostalgia, cleansed of poisonous memories, endures and is thus justified in its almost fatalistic clinging to a relic of racism. In many ways, this defiant use of an old nationalistic symbol, with its undisguised terrifying history, is nothing new or unique. It has comparisons in the recent fascist revivalism that has engulfed Europe in the aftermath of the Cold War, with the return of swastikas and Nazi symbolism and in the

¹⁶³ See George M. Fredrickson’s (1981) *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study of American and South African History*

¹⁶⁴ I borrow this term from the “Diverse Unfreedoms and their Ghosts” conference that took place at Rutgers University where I presented the paper “Post-apartheid Nostalgia and its Images of Common Sense” a revised edition of chapter four in this thesis.

more enduring history of the Confederacy flag in the southern
United States (Enwezor 1996:377)

After Enwezor spots the old South African flag hanging high from a neighbour's house in a suburb in Johannesburg, he writes the above quote as part of the opener to his "Reframing the Black Subject" essay. In his words; "as I write this I am listening to the wind snap the stiff cloth and colours of a fading flag". This essay marks somewhat of a watershed moment in critical art writing on post-apartheid art practice as it acutely identifies the first visual iterations of apartheid nostalgia in art practice. In the same essay Enwezor (1996) proceeds to unpack the excruciatingly tone-deaf work of female South African artists such as Candice Brietz's *Rainbow Series* and the curator Pippa Skotnes's *Miscast*. This thesis greatly expands on Enwezor's critical observations that he articulates as far back as 1997. However my original contribution lies in the fact that I read these selected images from contemporary art and media against the theoretical framework of nostalgia. I read the pleasure of nostalgia in relation to aspects of Afropessimism, particularly when I focus on the necessity of the condition of abjection from where these images emerge, and the sadomasochistic enjoyment that they sustain in antiblack modes of visual consumption.

I give greater substance to what in retrospect has taken a fuller shape and a more nuanced expression of nostalgia in post-apartheid art practice. This is why theoretically framing the selected works in this thesis within the context of post-apartheid nostalgia is very important, as it provides the context and structure of feeling in cultural representation that these images spring from. My theoretical framing of South Africa, in the post-apartheid present is largely led by the psychoanalytic work of Derek Hook, whose perspectives on the post-apartheid condition give room for a framing of nostalgia not only as regressive and also as a comfort producing defensive formation. The question of a retrospective nostalgia in South Africa is a necessary messy affair in spite of who may pose the question. State-sponsored post-apartheid narratives of a bad past and a better present have had an overarching presence in South African communal memory making. In this regard, betterment and forward movement conform to the modern ideology of progress, where

divisions between the past, present and future can be neatly marked and demarcated. Nostalgia is a sentiment and structure of feeling that looks back fondly, even when its object of nostalgia is perverse, and indefensible in the present.

If through the eyes of the world South Africa is now living in the future – a better future (Coullie 2014:201) – then how does one read the present and the post-apartheid future through the affective dimension of nostalgia, a sentiment that rebukes the present in attempting to reach out to a better past or a better future. The language of nostalgia is unflinchingly effacing and sanitising in its representations, it essentially originates from the desires of the affected individual in the case of reflective nostalgia, or the desires of the group in the case of a restorative nostalgia. Nostalgia is ultimately an expression of dissatisfaction about the present as articulated in Jacob Dlamini's novel where he fondly looks back into the apartheid past. In the "The ethics of nostalgia in post-apartheid South Africa", Coullie (2014:198) contextualises this sentiment:

Although typically a bittersweet emotional complex, nostalgia is usually experienced as more positive than negative. In popular parlance and amongst some key theorists in the field, nostalgia ordinarily elicits censure for romanticizing the past. Margalit says nostalgia is not innocent a trait as one might think [for it harbours a] tendency to kitsch representation of the past (2002,62). The problem morally with nostalgic kitsch is its sentimentality. 'Nostalgia distorts the past by idealizing it. People, events and objects of the past are presented as endowed with pure innocence' (Margalit 2002, 62).

What predominates explicitly from nostalgic remembrance and representation is the role of pleasure. Within the visual dimension this pleasure is encoded in the resuscitation of familiar visual tropes. In its prospective dimensions a restorative type of nostalgia has been instrumental in fostering South Africa's first iterations of a post-apartheid nation-building myth. I explore Bogosi Sekhukhuni's use of the archive, I analyse his video diaries within the retrospective dimensions of a prospective nostalgia. Whereas in the past, apartheid and separation where the national ideology, now in the post-apartheid 'future' rainbowism, and its 'feel good' rhetoric of post-racialism and repertoires of forgiveness, become temporal markers of progress that draw the line between the

past and the future. South Africa's continuous tenacious reaching for a better future also came in the form of Thabo Mbeki's failed vision of the "African Renaissance" which would transform "Africa's global status as an abject Other (object of critique, Orientalism, indifference, pity) into an autonomous subject" according to Farred (2003:67). This Africanist vision was ruptured by the explosive pandemic of HIV/AIDS that killed close to six million people in South Africa¹⁶⁵ (Shell 2000). In visual culture by way of Sekhukhuni's *Dream Diaries* this period is represented by the public profile of the sickly Nkosi Johnson, as seen in Sekhukhuni's video diary, where his image is layered on top of a party celebration backdrop of people dancing, a signifier for the post-apartheid triumphalist narrative. Sekhukhuni's careful and powerful layering of images of celebration and abjection speak to the disavowal and denialism of antiblackness that is necessary in order to preserve a post-apartheid vision of progress and futurity.

Incidents such as Marikana, the Reitz debacle and the continuing outbursts of Afrophobia/xenophobia and the generative circulations of their visual representations rupture this romantic image of futurity by echoing the chilling continuities of the past in the present. Such events are tenaciously labelled as anomalies: they are seen as disconnected from the everyday non-event of black abjection and exclusion. In this way *disavowal* safely disguises and safeguards the necessity of antiblackness in the new post-apartheid present.

¹⁶⁵ See Robert Shell's (2000) *HIV/AIDS: A Threat to the African Renaissance?*

APPENDIX ONE

Ayana V. Jackson Walkabout: Interview

10 October 2013

Gallery MOMO, Park Town North, Johannesburg

Ayana V. Jackson: I was born in New Jersey in the United States. I moved to South Africa in 2001, South Africa has basically been my second home. I have been living in South Africa and other outposts, but predominantly here. The primary concern of my work as an artist is African and African diaspora identity, the multiple subjectivities that come about in the diaspora as well as in Africa. I have an activism about wanting to multiply and complicate these multiple identities and subjectivities particularly to those of us who were born in the United States or are perhaps living in Europe, where you tend to find quite reductive and oversimplified perspectives of what it means to live in a black body or what it means to be African American. I come out of a social science background, specialising in sociology. I am a self-taught artist, a self-taught photographer.

Case # 33 I-VI (2013)

Ayana V. Jackson: We are going to begin at the end. This set is a very important set to me, to just give you a little bit of an idea. *Case number 33*, for those of you who are familiar with the story of Saartjie Baartman, her body parts were put and stored in jars and put on display, the reason I chose her is because towards the end of this project I started to wonder what it is about, and what I wanted to do. Saartjie Baartman spoke four languages, lived in two continents and

three countries, she was a cosmopolitan woman while at the same time she is a figure that has been victimised, even now as we discuss her story, in a way, she is still just a set of body parts, we don't really know her story in terms of her complexities. There are several works in this show that pay homage to her. What we find a lot in the archival imagery is the profile, the front and the mugshot, a lot of that was about the phenotype, the African phenotype. When people like Duggan-Cronin, the photographers who were working at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, moving throughout different parts of Africa, and Latin America they were constantly taking these prototypes and phenotypes kind of images. For me, I wanted to create more dimensions, so in this case we have multiple identities, you looking at this kind of imagery and its history, North America, South America, West Africa, North Africa, Southern Africa, the urban women as well as the rural women. After creating all of the works, this is the last constellation, this is the last image that I did, so at this point with this work, I was intending to turn my back on the archive. Well I guess I should not have put the cart before the horse. You guys are familiar with the premise that I am recreating images from the nineteenth century, early twentieth century of the black body, of the non-white non-European body specifically. The purpose of doing that is to interrogate the kinds of messages that were being communicated through those images, the role of those images and the conception of racialised thinking. The fact that many of these ethnographic, anthropological photographs were illustrating racial hierarchy, that basically allowed people not to be seen as human, as subhuman, for instance, justified through photography

Diorama I (2012), Don't hide the blade/How do you think their women dress? (2013), Does the brown paper bag test really exist?/Will my father be proud? (2013)

These three images are quite important because what I have been doing is recognising different tropes and different locations in the archive. Every one of these images has an exact original image that I have referenced, that I have tried to stay as faithful to, such as the images from the

human zoos, so it is again about images that are again about racial phenotypes. If you consider Saartjie Baartman they considered her as an animal-human, the missing link between humans and animals, the kind of ideology that allowed her to be treated this way. When photography began in 1939, they would make literal dioramas, where people would come look at them in human zoos, for instance this image was taken in Paris and put on display in France.

Diorama IV (Tierra del Fuego) (2013)

This one, I thought was quite interesting because, in terms of how they would compose and position them, this is a point when photographs move away from this kind of ethnographic, anthropological moving into composition and theatre. Something that is important to remember when we look at this archive is that many of us have engaged with the archive as fact, as illustrations of fact. We need to acknowledge that very little was not staged in the making of these photographs. Then we can think about what kind of narratives are present in this stage. It took a very long time to actually create a photograph, those people had to stand still.

Does the brown paper bag test really exist? / Will my father be proud? (2013)

With this one, also one of the later works I have made, I wanted to also remember the urban woman, in a lot of this archive, the ones we are familiar with, you see a lot of focus on tradition, the traditional and nudity as oppose to culture and geography. For those of you who are familiar with *The Black Photo Album* by Santu Mafokeng, I want to remember and remind us that, that we also had urban women, who were dressed in the culture of the day. Saartjie Baartman did not walk around London naked, she wore Victorian clothes because it was during the Victorian age. So I also wanted to remember that, and importantly, there is no hierarchical relationship, between rural and urban. I believe that the Judeo-Christian framework we are taught to consider nudity problematic, but in my opinion there was nothing sexual about a rural woman walking

around bare breasted in the rural areas, it was the gaze that was put upon them from the European perspective that decided it was indecent or uncivilised.

Do you dream? / Do you come from far? (2013) What will you tell them about me? / Do you feel pain? (2013) Prototype/Phenotype (2013)

This is a good place to speak a bit about my process, basically I am the photographer, I am the sitter and I am the editor, so basically I work with a digital camera, I connect it to my computer in my studio. On my computer I can watch myself and I can control the image. I pose for myself and what is very interesting about that is, it is a bit like being in the mirror. My work raises concerns and activism around the representation of the black body. It is narcissistic because it is self [centred], it is about me wanting to address my relationship to images of people who look like me, whether they are American, Latin American or African, for me it is about addressing representations that are associated with my body. So in that case it is interesting when I am making my work, in a sense it is like playing in the mirror, doing reflections and refractions, it is very contemplative, I use a timer, sometimes I use a worm [a worms eye view], and eraser. The backgrounds are digitally scanned, then the process of the photomontage begins, a version of collage, this is one photograph, there is another photograph. Then I cut this one out, and cut this one out and put them together and then I put those two on top of the background, before I put them on top of this background, I play around with the background, a lot of inverting and solarising, manipulation, adding, greying, adding digital noise. Obviously because I am working in the 21st century a lot of my initial images are quite sharp, high resolution, so a lot of what I am working on is based on memory. I thought about the process of degrading them further and further until I can get closer to something I believe triggers the memory of the era that I am speaking about.

Question from the audience: Imposing the gaze upon your own body, would you say you problematise that gaze, self-imposing the body on yourself?

Ayana V. Jackson: I always say that the real work is not in the physical form, it is in the imaginary. On some days I do feel as recreated and re-objectified, my body or a woman's body. I have assumed the colonial gaze and put it on myself. On other days, I think about the process of having created the work, having to sit for instance, for an hour essentially, for instance trying to get the right whatever, and there are so many things that go through my mind in the process and I began to think about all things that would have gone through the minds of the women when they were posing in these images. Suddenly I stopped looking at these archival women as objects and actually began to view them as individuals and such, wondering what happened to their bodies through this imagery, and began to wonder what was their experience, so for me they became alive. I would not go so far as to say I have given them agency by any means but I began to think about their agency, especially with regard to the theatre of these images. I began to wonder, that it can't be the case that in every situation she had no say in the pose, which is why in the titles they are my thoughts in no particular order, refer to the voice and the thoughts of the photographer and the thoughts of and voice of the sitter. So in this case, I was thinking "what will you tell them about me?" because certain points, with the very first images, there were no reference points they did not know what the machine was, right? Because obviously they weren't printing them out manually, in 1890. But then eventually they would see their own image, it was not possible to want to have one of those and then it is not possible to wonder "where will this go" and "what will you say" but then at the same time "do you feel pain?". I mean then at the same time to me this is a culmination of meaning. On one hand because it was physically painful, it is possible that the photographer was aware of that and was not necessarily being insensitive to her and her body.

Zamansale Nsele: This question is in reference to *The Gaze*: is one of your goals to make your spectators complicit in a historically Western gaze, a gaze that is historically exploitative and dehumanising? If so why?

Ayana V. Jackson: Absolutely, the work is intended for you to be uncomfortable with it, you are not allowed to really rest in its aesthetics without addressing its history. The thing about photography is an art form and it is also a skill. There are means and ways of viewing. There is a piece that is from “poverty pornography”, even now when you look at photojournalism, the most horrendous atrocity is still popping the grains and copying the reds and framed perfectly, it is still a beautiful image of something that is tragic and the thing of aestheticising that is inherent in the history of photography. You are intended to be drawn in, you are intended to be seduced, but then you are also intended to be freaked out, freaked out by your own thoughts, you know. The third process depends on potentially how you read the work, you are meant to grapple with it, you are meant to be disturbed and question your own relationship with that image, which brings me to the video room.

The Video Room *we move to the video room

Ayana V. Jackson: This room works around this image entitled *Demon Devotees*, as it focuses on this photograph that was taken in 1890 in what was then known as the Belgian Congo. It was interesting for me, because when I found it, I thought it was profoundly disturbing, because I was looking at it from a postcolonial perspective. When I look at it, I see the binaries of the white and the black, the pyramid – who is at the apex and who is at the base, who is clothed and not clothed, how problematic that cult was and all of this, but when I think of how it was read in 1890. When they took this photograph back to Brussels or wherever the photographer was from, for many of them it was the first time they saw what an African looks like or what a Congolese looks like and then again you are still engaging with the pose, the frame the hierarchy, the clothed the unclothed. So it read differently back then, than it is being read now. There are very few people that would find that a great photograph, a glorifying photograph a glorifying image,

they would find it problematic in the 21st century. What I was thinking about in this work is how we read images, and in a way encouraging people, in reference to the previous question, to be aware of what is being communicated to us via imagery. So one of the ways I wanted to play with that idea was to say with reference to gender, sex and race, what do you get from the image? What ideology is being maintained? *Demons and Devotees*, in 1890, who was the demon and who was the devotee? Perhaps it would be a different pairing in the 21st century; I think it quite obvious narratives would be happening in this room.

The video, *Original Sin*

In this video entitled *Original Sin*, I pretended to be a missionary, there is text coming from Phyllis Wheatley who was a female black-American poet, she was enslaved, she taught herself to read and write. She wrote what is considered to be the United States first published book by a black author. It is very religious in nature and the quote that I read here, “It was mercy that brought us from my pagan land, taught my benighted soul to understand the grace of god and to remember,” and if we remember Christian Negroes could still be defined and rejoice in each other’s pain. For me it is very important that we remember that all of humanity is a victim of this kind of thought. We have internalised it ourselves as black people and it has been internalised basically general and it has a lot to do with propaganda and imagery. In the second text – there are three other texts – is Leopold II and Joseph Chamberlain and then Hegel the philosopher. In all three of them, you have quotes like “you can’t break the chains of barbarism that plagues Africa, without force”.

“ The tide is with us the world is with us.....” These are Hegel’s words, who is a stalwart in philosophy, who speaks about Africa in two paragraphs starting with “the negro has no development, no moral character, their place is not really part of the world”. In that sense I am trying to get to the roots of Kant’s “original sin” the pedagogical roots of racialised thinking that essentially feed the images in this history. In this room we continue looking at *Photography*

Pornography, I was interested in the motifs or the tropes that were often at play. We moved from this kind of imagery that was based characterising them: on racial phenotypes of people. Anyone that is familiar with the painting, *The Three Graces*, will know that it is quite popular in sculptures, in paintings all over Europe. It is interesting how they moved from characterising them to creating knowledge. I don't know what the purpose of this image is, there is a point where even though they were distributed as ethnographic, there did come a point where they became downright pornographic. At that time especially in the late nineteenth century it was absolutely unacceptable to carry around an image of a nude or semi-nude white woman, but it was absolutely justifiable if it was with black women, you could have it in your home, you could have it in your study, your wife would not mind. You could look at her body but you could not look at a white women's body. So at a certain point it does become pornographic. This one goes back to the diorama situation, the reference of this one is also in Paris, the human zoos, the background is *Le Jardin d'Acclimatation* still exists, it is basically a theme park, they are not human zoos any more. But up until the thirties, if you go there now, this is probably the most recognisable buildings

I have gone back forth about this, but I can never really rest on that and say no. At the same time there is not enough of emotion and uncomfortable feeling looking at the work, even if you dare to look at it only aesthetically or only as a beautiful black woman's body. I think it they are too close to or too faithful to their original and our postcolonial reading of the original, is really too ... is a little too rightful to rest in that. As I said you get ping-ponged back and forth between is it enough, has it not done anything, and just that state of thinking about it, reading this image, reading what we know about the other images. It is not so much that I want to give new knowledge, it is more that I want to move towards an active, critical reading and particularly of the archive and possibly recognising that this type of imagery continues to live into the present day.

Zamansele Nsele: Do you intend your imagery to be beautiful and live up to aesthetic principles considering the dark history they represent?

The tradition of photography is to create a beautiful image and so I am being faithful to that but at the same time, I mentioned there is a tension of seduction and repulsion, is very important to the work. When we think about the archive and contemporary work, what they call poverty pornography, it does exactly that, it lures you in, but you don't want to look, and then you are looking some more and then you are having an uncomfortable relationship to it. It is intended for the viewer to maybe at a personal level engage with it aesthetically, be attracted to it, but then questions your root reaction to it; questions your physical, emotional reaction.

Question from the audience: Perhaps this question has been asked already, I am interested in, could you go back to when you started the work, the work that we have seen before, what was the initial idea, because I think it has morphed into something intriguing, I am interested in what the initial thought was as you started to explore?

Are you familiar with the artists Gilbert and George? Gilbert and George are a pair of artists who work quite big with the sacred and profane right? So they are gay, and they make use of nudity in works, naked male bodies penises, bodies coloured in the background, mirrors black and white in the mirrors, solarising, they put turds out there and penises in the background. Initially at that time it was crazy to do something like that, so initially in making my aesthetic choices, I thought about them the first time I started using this character in the *Poverty Pornography* series. So I borrow from them. This one is also one of my favourites, this is the first image where I really borrowed their language, I really wanted to talk about again the profane, like for instance this image, the reference is the lynching postcards. During this time in the eighties and all the way up until the end of enslavement it was quite popular to take your family out and watch the negro get lynched. Then you could get your photographs taken with it and then send it around. It was a pleasurable kind of thing and that is profane and that is absolutely disgusting, so in a way again,

it is a different thing with Gilbert and George and I, but I like to put it out there, play with it and then the mirror on the background is actually on a slave plantation in Louisiana .

This project began with playing around, there was a lot of mirroring in the images kaleidoscoping. I was playing around with their language and this is where it landed.

To answer the initial question, *Death*, (Figure 3.11) was exhibited at the 2012 art fair, it was really funny because if you know art fairs it is like basically like a booth it is like a trade fair and people are walking around, and we had it like on this wall and people were walking towards it, and one time I was sitting there, for like half a day and then watching people and they would come and get closer and they would be, like literally going through the emotional stages.

Initially above the seduction and repulsion thing, initially it looks like a beautiful women's body suspended on a black and white context, because I kept the noose along with the background, it one of the last things that you register and then that shock, that discomfort.

Zamansele Nsele: In the process the of making your imagery do you ever consider the role and notion of a black spectatorship since they are implicated in your work, do you think that they are seduced by this imagery that you make?

Yes and no, honestly I hate to say this but I am not concerned with a black spectatorship, it was very interesting at the first week of the gallery, the opening, and the sheer number of white-haired, white men were coming in the gallery and I was sitting there thinking, what are they thinking? Like why are they here, but once I stopped to talk to them I found out that some of them were researchers and that one of them had a PhD in archival photography, after projecting on to them, I don't know about the rest of the guys. Like I said, when we were in the other room is that we are all victims of this kind of imagery, we are all victims of what this imagery has imprisoned in our minds and how it has given birth to other tropes in photography: in the media, with regard to what black bodies are photographed, what black bodies are not photographed, how black bodies are being photographed and going back to the poverty pornography also the black

body as spectacle, the use of the construction of blackness. It is not truthfully a construction of blackness so much as it is a construction of whiteness. In that many of these works were used to define 'the other' but the purpose of defining the other was contingent on the construction of European identity as not that, and so the use of the black body in the construction of whiteness is quite important and interesting to me. Pointing fingers at it, as I said it is hard for me to imagine anyone who really ... Like someone said "wow she has nice boobs", it was funny because she said to herself, she needed it because she had only engaged with it intellectually it was hard for her not to engage with the work not in that way. If you engage with the work in a narrow manner, I think you are a lost cause, honestly I think there is enough to make you uncomfortable.

Zamansale Nsele: Your work engages with the archive in a nostalgic manner; your images are beautiful, they engage with the past in a romantic way, is intentional?

Ayana V. Jackson: One of the things that has always fascinated me is memory and nostalgia. I might take this question in a different direction from the way that you mean it. For instance, as a black US American descendant of the transatlantic slave trade, I was born in 1977, I can only have a nostalgic relationship with slavery. This is part of the experience of my people, in the sense that it is a part of my past, it is a part of the experience of my people, but I was not there and so my relationship to that narrative is very much nostalgic. I mean nostalgic in the sense that I am wishing for the day, but also nostalgic in the memories, the imaginations and its fictions that it mixes with and its flaws. My reactions too are based not so much on experience, so that is just one thing, I want to say about nostalgia, but in terms of what I don't really know.

The other thing that happens with these images is, but I don't want to ever say, that I have given a voice of agency to the women or the people in these images. At the same time, it was a moment, I try to remember the National Geographic like in 1982, first time I saw boobs black women in Africa. I do remember thinking there was something wrong, because I am Catholic and by that time, I was thinking why they are naked? My preaching, my pedagogy was that this

is improper behaviour, improper dress, what is wrong with them? They are not civilised, even as a black eleven year old or six year old, so obviously as I became more learned, I threw that away, but I didn't come to the point where I remembered that there is absolutely nothing wrong with a women baring her breasts in her cultural space, where that is what one does. To read her as problematic, is you reading how you have been taught to engage with that image.

So now when I look at those, and when I look at the original, I am no longer focused on the narrative of the photographer or the archive, now for me at least I can say I have claimed her back. The first thing I can remember is that there is absolutely nothing wrong, immoral, uncivilised or savage about the reference image or how I have recreated the image also. So the experience of embodying and performing also helps for myself. I can kind of say I don't want to use that narrative about Africa, I can choose to relate to it differently, I don't want that late 19th century, early 20th century narrative, about Africa, I can choose to relate to it differently, I can choose for it not to pain me.

Question from the media: Do you think your message is similar to from the world war, the idea of let's not forget, you have got to remind people, you are not glorifying the history?

There is definitely a part of that to it, it really about being able to relate to that chapter of photographic history to what we have now. The *Poverty Pornography* series, there is a glorification of poverty, and there is also an over representation of death, disaster, destruction, dictatorship, disease, and that is not only how we see black bodies, non-European bodies but how we are more comfortable with seeing them. One of my very first projects was on hip-hop in Ghana. One of the criticisms that I got from it was "that is such a shame, that they are so Americanised" and I was like why the shame, basically they were accusing these American artists of assimilating a global hip hop movement all over the world, accusing them of being in authentically African. The idea of what is authentically African or black?

Again, as I got moving was about trying to find the original sin, the seed. For me it was this chapter of photography, that was dedicated to the colonial mission, that chapter you know, go on your boat and you find the most “savage” part of Africa, you take your photos and you take this thing back and you say this is how the savages look like. For me that is where the original sin is. As I mentioned with this Phyllis Wheatly poem, she decides that even as a black women, because she has been taught to hate her blackness to the point where she thinks it was mercy that saved the pagan land, black woman. But at the same time, I invited Achille Mbembe to write the excerpt for the catalogue, one of my favourite scholars, it was funny because, after I had done the work I sent it all to him. I invited Thembinkosi and a few other curators to have a panel discussion around the issues of poverty pornography. One of the first things Goniwe said is that we need to be careful with becoming obsessed with someone else’s possessed discourse of ourselves, to the point where we forget what we have to say about ourselves. I realised as I had sent them out to ask him to write them that, it had literally become someone else’s obsession with someone else’s possessed discourse of black bodies. In the end even though he accused me of narcissism, he asked the question if these images serve to deconstruct or are they just a narcissistic exercise and it is a question I can’t truly answer.

Question from the audience: This image is very powerful and it reminds me of a painting, which is exactly like this. I suppose what is giving me goosebumps, is the element of nostalgia and prettiness because it makes the otherwise grotesque, seem, romantic, I think that is why Zama was asking that question aren’t you scared that will say you have romanticised something quite horrific?

Ayana V. Jackson: You both can tell me, if you have engaged the work in that way.

Comment from an audience member: It is a picture with a dark theme, it doesn’t actually make it pretty, it actually highlights the fact that it is not to me.

Comment from another member: I just want to add, when I came here on Monday because I thought the exhibition was ending on Monday. I walked around and scanned all the pictures quickly but when I came around this corner, because I came quickly when I first looked, I thought pretty, but when I looked again and saw the noose, immediately my whole body shook. I got that reaction that you were speaking about, but also aesthetically, the camera's capture everything, it is a beautiful photograph, but for me it ultimately highlighting the beauty and sacredness of life, it is about death, but for me it's saying let's respect and cherish life

Ayana V. Jackson: That's is why I say I try my best not to underestimate the intelligence of my audience, so I generally don't think that one can necessarily engage with it on a purely aesthetic level. But I will say this, it is very interesting to have this work at a commercial gallery, because I forget until someone buys just one work, I forget that the work can be taken completely out of context. There is something important about being able to engage with these images together, being able to get pulled in and pulled out in multiple spaces and maybe that is what I am trying to do, but in that sense. I do believe the work is gauged towards an institution space, but then at the same time, I have had the pleasure of meeting my collectors, who absolutely get what I am talking about. So then I don't have to worry leaving my baby with I don't know, he is going to take care of my baby, it is going to be all right, my baby is not going to get raped, he is not going to let my baby be taken too far out of context. The moment where I start to worry about the questions you are talking about, but at the same time the artist creates bodies of work and they are rarely discussed out of context

Question from an audience member: You have been living in South Africa since 2007 and you were born in 1977 in New Jersey, so with this collection of photos where are you going with nostalgia, is that one of your reasons for living in South Africa is that you are closer to the atrocities that we have here, I mean the '80s are not that far away, which is when I arrived here?

Ayana V Jackson: To be honest I didn't come here to be closer to the atrocities no, when I want to get mad at racism, it happens when I am in Paris, it is Paris, it is Berlin, it is Germany it is France. There is a kind of thing where they do not discuss race at all because they don't discuss difference and so therefore it puts a muzzle over anyone who wants to discuss issues related to racism. It is one of the most enraging places to be, they openly acknowledge that everyone is part of the republic, but just the fact that they say everyone is acknowledged even if you come from our former colony. Clearly, they are not going to acknowledge the Senegalese people that live here, not going to say people that live in our former colony, it is absurd. I came to South Africa because it has a lot of infrastructure for the work that I do. It is not about the importance of it being in an African country even though I do believe that Africa is the future. But my father's generation held more of a romantic view about Africa. The idea of going home to Africa, Africa being home, I am of the generation that considers itself black American because I believe black Americans are part of the founding fathers of the United States, not just because of their labour but their political and cultural contributions, so I definitely claim America even though I am black. But I do get often asked the questions, not all of these images originate in Africa, some of my reference images are from the United States are from South America, so it was not just the African body that was subjected to this gaze, it was also the non-white, non-European body. I have been asked if I even have the right to assume the position of a black African woman and it is a funny question. One of the things that binds Africa specifically to the transatlantic African diaspora, is the experience of living in a black body of this age, whether you are a black body that was born in the Gambia, Senegal, Papua New Guinea or Mexico, you are always walking through life constantly tripping over the shadow of racialised thinking. This is something that you don't have to be African to know. You don't have to live in Africa to engage with it.

Question from the audience: have you ever exhibited your work together side by side with the originals?

This exhibition has a twin show in Paris, open right now and in the Paris exhibition we have a vitrine with the originals.

APPENDIX TWO

Andrew Putter Interview,

15 November 2013

Cape Town

Zamansele Nsele: How did you come up with the title? What inspired the title *Native Work* and *African Hospitality*?

Andrew Putter: I would like to begin by speaking about the process of making the work, *Native Work*. It took me a long time; it took over two years to make it. The work itself emerged out of a process of thinking and making. My subsequent way of thinking about the work changed all the time. I am prefacing that because my views about the work [have] are changing rapidly, because of the work I am currently doing on the streets, which is work that came out of *Native Work*. *Native Work* as a title, is a play on the word 'native'. While I was growing up during apartheid, it was a word often used as a derogatory word. I wanted to experiment with reclaiming it. It is obviously tricky because of my subject condition, but I thought I would do it anyway and see what happens. So obviously I am referencing the use of the word native, to refer to the African, the black, in a derogatory way, but I am also referencing the fact that I am a native and so there is a relationship between a double thing happening.

African Hospitality is the name of a painting of a shipwreck that happened in the past. The shipwreck happened in 1783. It is a very interesting title for a painting, to look at and read in the post-apartheid context. Because he was painting as a British painter, painting about the event

in which British subjects had been left at the southern African coast of Africa. They subsequently disappeared from European history, but now had entered into African history in such a way that they survived through the generosity of African people. For me it was an affirmation of a perspective of Africa that was missing when I was growing up.

Zamansele Nsele: Your work that is of particular interest in my research is *Native Work* and *African Hospitality*, because I believe they play with the theme of nostalgia. Was it a conscious decision to frame it in the manner that you do?

Andrew Putter: Yes, so I am quite interested in beauty and of course it depends on the perspective of who's looking at it; some people look at my work and they are absolutely appalled and horrified. I was interested in how to use the aesthetic, especially the beautiful in the aesthetic, as a way of drawing different kind of views into the work. There is something about the romantic that does that, and when you use the word romantic, the word romantic can also have a radical edge. There is also the sublime in the romantic and so I suppose my hope is that by treating those sitters with such care aesthetically [...] was such a labour to make that work, in the preproduction, production and in the post-production. It was quite a bit of work to make.

In terms of the presentation of the sitters, there was something about presenting those dangerous images from the archive, to represent them in a way that I started to unsettle the simple ways of reading the old image. To take the aesthetic strategy of Duggan-Cronin, a colonial photographer, and really push it. He wanted to make things that he thought were really beautiful – that is my intuition. He saw himself more as artist than as an ethnographer, he really wanted to make beautiful images, although the assumption is that he was playing into a stereotyping at some level. He was playing into the idea that they are savages at some level. To present another human being with that kind of fragility, where you can almost read the landscape

in the touch light of the eye, that creates an initial shock to the viewer, [the] photograph is incredibly detailed. There is a complex aesthetic space that I was playing in.

Zamansele Nsele: Would it be a misreading to read your images as fetishistic?

Andrew Putter: I do not believe in misreadings of images. I just think there are multiple readings, I think the more multiple and diverse, the better.

Zamansele Nsele: Would that not have been your intention?

Andrew Putter: I don't know. It is one of the ways in which the fetish works, it is a double-edged sword. My work is about how our tastes are changed. One of the things that I suspect that taste does is that it draws us into other connections in the cultural universe. When I take this change, there is an opportunity that another realm opens up to us politically, culturally, ethically, socially and that is one of the things that I think the fetish can do.

But again, it is a double-edged sword because the fetish can close the radical alterity of the other, but I think it is more complex than that. It has a symbolic and romantic fetishistic character. You start to seduce someone, somebody's eyes and taste, so that when they are walking on the street or when they are watching television, their inclination changes, they start to see what they did not notice and see before. What do we see and what don't we see, this is what I wanted to shift by making this work. As a gay man and as a person who grew up during apartheid, when walking down the street, I generally don't notice women on the street and I don't notice black people on the street. So my eye will find white men and for a long time I have thought about the sexual but not the racial component of that and I have done work that addresses the gender component and making work that shifts it has been successful. My sensorium is very different to what it was three years ago when I am on the street, who I connect with who I don't. Whom my eyes meet and who they don't.

Zamansele Nsele: In your essay published in *Kronos*, you state that *Native Work* is a response to Duggan-Cronin's photographs of black southern Africans? From my point of view, there are more similarities than differences in your techniques. I am interested in the process, because also reading your essay you say that you went to the outskirts of Cape Town to select sitters that resemble some sense of authenticity.

Andrew Putter: I would not use the word authentic. The word authentic is too sexualised. I was privileging a certain type of beauty.

Zamansele Nsele: I remember the point in your essay where your assistant said the people in the inner city have fat faces. Can you speak more about that?

Andrew Putter: It is Thokozile: she is an actor, she is a cultural icon in the broader city, she is in a long television series, I keep on forgetting it, that first multiracial series, *Egoli*. She is one of the first people I met that helped me find sitters for this project since my network is predominantly white, middle class. I needed someone connected to black people of a wide range of ages. She writes drama, she is a performer and she has performed around the world. So I showed her photographs of Duggan-Cronin's work and she looked them and she said, "You won't find people that look like these people; all the people that I know in Langa township or close to the city everyone has gone away."

Zamansele Nsele: That's interesting

Andrew Putter: It is interesting, I don't know if it true or not. It is not as if I don't know Langa township. I know Langa, I knew Langa before I met Thokozile but I didn't know Khayelitsha well and when she said that, I had to make a decision about what kind of faces I wanted. And so I made the decision to go with faces that have the same aesthetic mould of the Duggan-Cronin faces.

Zamansele Nsele :You wanted to remain faithful to Duggan-Cronin’s aesthetic?

Andrew Putter: I think so [yeah]. What is interesting about all of those faces is that they are faces of contemporary people. So there is a strange decision on the one hand, because it affirms a typology in one way, which is dangerous.

Zamansele Nsele: I ask that question, because I am sure Cronin carefully selected his sitter. I don’t think he just went around and took pictures of anyone; in his mind he must have had criteria.

Andrew Putter: Duggan-Cronin took thousands and thousands of pictures, that he must have gone through. What I was doing, I was looking at all of the wide-ranging photographs. I looked at many, many photographs. I photographed them many times. To say that I was affirming his aesthetic is not quite true, the process of me making a selection from the archive comes from the world around me, the faces that I may have seen on the streets. It is a very complex thing.

Zamansele Nsele: To what extent did you use post-production to edit these photographs? What effects did you attempt to achieve?

Andrew Putter: The post-production was very carefully and aesthetically managed. I sat in front of the computers every day for hours and hours, working at the level of pixels. Now that I think about it one of the things that I was trying to affirm, one of my close acquaintances. Do you know Nonhlanla Tiger-lilly. She is young, in fashion and she works with vintage stuff. She buys second-hand stuff, clothes, then she runs little projects: sets up shows, with rails and things, what she puts together very inspiring things. When I first met her, she was presenting at a young creatives event in Khayelitsha, talking about culture and she had a slideshow in the background on her own work and stuff she was inspired by; one of my photographs was included in her slide show, one of the black and white photographs. I had not met her so I went up and spoke to her, introduced myself.

She said, “Wow”; what she said was that, “We could have never made that”. I don’t know what she means by that, but I think she means that being a young black woman, [she] could have not made a work like that. In her slide show, she spoke about how she was interested in her ancestral culture and prayer. My sense is that the work of mine that she picked up on, was something affirming for her. I mean I have not had a chance to properly discuss it with her, but that was one of things that I was hoping would happen. That for young black people that there would be a kind of care taken with the work. Again, it is work sitting at a very difficult place that’s bordering on being dangerous, bordering on [being] paternalistic, fetishistic, reinforcing stereotypes. But I was hoping that some people would pick it up as a potential of affirmation that could lead somewhere and she did. I was like oh my god someone got it, the right person got it, because there has been a lot of criticism of the work which I haven’t followed. specially from white people. But I haven’t followed into it; I make the work and then move on to the next step.

Zamasele Nsele: I am glad that you are speaking about that because it leads me to my next question on spectatorship. When I first saw the images, I remember thinking that these images will be divisive in relation to spectatorship. When you look at these images, one thinks about how black people regard these in relation to a white spectatorship in South Africa?

Andrew Putter: After I had made the work, one of the first things that I did was to call in black friends of mine in various fields: in drama, fine art, local black people, to ask them about it. I put the work on the wall and stepped [aside] and I said, “Won’t you look at this and give me feedback, and tell me how you feel about it? Your initial thoughts”. All of them liked it and that gave me courage to carry on. When he (Mfundo) looked at the work, he was so inspired.

Zamasele Nsele: What about the other side of the debate, where one could say your reference of the colonial ethnographic archive, such as Cronin’s, risks consolidating or

perpetuating a gaze that “others” and objectifies black bodies in a racialising way? Was this a concern for you in the process of producing these photographs?

Andrew Putter: Do you think these images are racialising?

Zamansele Nsele: As far as I am concerned, I think when a black body is displayed there is always an uncertainty and risk, particularly in art gallery spaces which are white, and have fostered a way of looking and consuming black bodies. But in your work I did find that you attempted to bring a sense of dignity, as opposed to a typical exploitative sexualising, that is typical to that kind of work.

Andrew Putter: I must say that when I first saw the work of Duggan-Cronin – which was a long time ago, about six years ago – I was much more of a racist than I am now, unconsciously so. I am not proud of it. But having grown up during apartheid, racism was integral to my subjectivity. When I first saw the work of Duggan-Cronin, I was shocked at the person looking back at me; it forced me to reassess, the fetishism of that kind of tribalising, nativising, primitivising emblem that from a distance I thought I was seeing in the rest of the work.

On one level, there was a form of simplification that is bad as I focused on the work, and as I focused on the person in the photograph, there was something about the way the photo was taken, the medium, the way it had been taken, set up. That it created the possibility of an encounter for me with something was renewing, that felt humanising in a new and radical way. That is what I wanted to hold on to somehow in my encounter with Duggan-Cronin. and use in a way through my own process of producing my own work. I am glad that you say that because I spent such a long time trying to get it right.

Zamansele Nsele: In relation to the imagery that was produced in the past, if you look at the colonial genre of postcards it normalises a particular gaze.

Andrew Putter: Exactly, if you think about someone like Duggan-Cronin who worked in the mines, spent all of his holidays working as a prison guard; in his spare time he spent out in the field, unpaid initially getting to know people, getting to know the chief, asking if he could go photographing people. Even though there was a colonial separation, he had to live in a tent by himself. It was radical at the time to step out of his world and get out there and live with the people and travelling across the whole of southern Africa. For a colonial person at that time to do that, something must have changed. It's so easy to see all the mistakes in his works, I wanted to argue for looking with more of an open heart.

Zamansale Nsele: **There is an interesting contrast in the depiction of the female figures in *African Hospitality* and in *Native Work*. In *African Hospitality* the white female is bare breasted and when I first saw *Native Work*, the first thing I thought was where are the breasts?**

Andrew Putter: They were initially there and later I took them out. As I was making the work I became more aware of the difficulty of working with the black body and I remember Mbembe had written his piece around the abject black body. You know for example, I know when I am represented by someone else for example in your thesis or in the newspaper, I know that what happens to that representation is beyond my control. I was really concerned that the people that I was photographing, that if there was a shit storm around my work or something like that their implication would be something that they couldn't foresee. That they may not be prepared to deal with, which is always the case when you are working with anyone.

I felt that on the spectrum of what was worth taking a risk around, that to show somebody's breasts, I spoke to some of my black friends about it, I spoke to one young film maker about the project, and I said to him, "I have photographed some women, some of them showing their breasts", and he said he feels very uncomfortable about that. A couple of other

people said they were fine with it. I said, “But now c’mon, I spent time like hanging out with the sitters, some of them belong to a dance group in Makhaza – she works with 30 to 40 kids every day. They range from the age between six and seven to 21; none of the girls wear tops, they spend the weekend dancing together. I got to photograph them, no, thought twice about it, was like whatever”. And I was like, “What about that?” and he said, “Well yes, but you won’t see those people walking topless going to fetch water”. I said, “You are absolutely right”.

That is when I started becoming aware of that issue that you raise of the gallery space. It is something that I need to think more about; I think it something that is at the top of my mind especially with this new body of work that I am making, not quite in the way that you phrase it, I am glad that you brought it up, I am grateful to you for that. From that conversation, I just trusted him – he affirmed a whole lot of the worries that I had. Much as I would have loved to[...]Those young women that I know that are dancing, they dance all over the place; they dance at school events bare breasted. You go to Angola, you go to Mozambique and immediately you feel relaxed about your body, you realise you have a body again. In South Africa, everyone is anxious about breasts; I mean there is something about women who breastfeed in public, who are relaxed about their breasts and can whip them out in public. It is a pity the relationship that we have with our bodies in South Africa.

Zamansale Nsele: *African Hospitality* is quite subversive to the colonial, Christian, civilising narrative, in the manner that it portrays white bodies in “semi-nude” in “tribal” attires and props? Why were you were inspired to engage this particular archive in the manner that you did?

Andrew Putter: I could do it with that work; it was easy to be cheeky with *African Hospitality* and people really love that work. Especially my gay male friends, it operates at a lot of levels, I mean wouldn’t be amazing if there were more semi-nudity of the black body, that it slowly

became less trapped in that anthropological gaze? I am thinking about that dancer, what's her name, she is Congolese and she dances bare breasted; she cut her hair in a flat and square way, she is photographed with a cigarette hanging from her mouth¹⁶⁶, a very contemporary[...] I think she is Congolese, she might be West African. There is a possibility, but it is near impossible to get away with that as a white man; but I am starting to realise that as my understanding and confidence around race questions is growing, and as my networks are expanding, I am understanding others' voices. I am also understanding that even I can be more radical. I can take more chances; I am feeling less trapped in my subject position. I don't know if that makes sense. I don't where it is leading, but there is also a carefulness that we also [must] be aware of. You know what I mean; it also can be a trap. There is a young dancer, she is a Ugandan playwright working in Kenya, she is transgendered, she is transitioning into being a woman. Her take on gender is outside of the categories that we have inherited from colonialism and apartheid. I am really interested in those positions; there is a carelessness that comes from a deep engagement with the present and the future. I am thinking out loud now, I am not arguing for carelessness but people like Nonhlanhla who disregard what is proper, in a good way.

Zamansele Nsele: Do you intend to create discomfort in the process of making your work?

Andrew Putter: I have always tended to want positivity but as I am getting older, there is a part of me that is attracted to rebellion.

¹⁶⁶ I think he is referring to a photograph of Grace Jones in her album cover *Night Clubbing*. It is a portrait of Grace Jones taken by Jean Paul Goude in 1981. In the photograph, Grace Jones is wearing a black suit, her skin has been painted to look navy blue, she wears a box haircut giving her an androgynous look, and a cigarette dangles from her mouth.

APPENDIX THREE

Interview with Andile Buka, Project Co-ordinator of the *Native Nostalgia* Exhibition

February, 2014

Museum Of African Design (MOAD), Fox Street, Johannesburg

Zamansele Nsele: Could you introduce yourself? What is your name?

Andile Buka: My name is Andile Buka, I am the project manager at MOAD, I am responsible for making sure the exhibition goes according to plan; I work with curators in facilitating how the show should look like. This exhibition is based on a book by Jacob Dlamini, *Native Nostalgia*. This book was not well received in the country, mainly because Dlamini is highlighting something positive about the struggle. In a way, we have been hearing more negative aspects about the struggle or rather people tend to forget the positive aspects, they would rather suppress it. He claims by doing that you are suppressing a part of you. I was really taken by what he had said in the book. Dlamini grew up in Katlehong; he says that even if people were living under oppression, they still had options and the music and culture is a representation. Dlamini claims that there were a lot of good things that happened even when people were being oppressed. So in planning this show we looked at artists who are in a way doing the same thing as Jacob Dlamini, who by making reference to the past, they represent themselves today in a positive way.

The first artists that I will talk about is I See a Different You, who in their work share a similar approach to Jacob Dlamini. They are basically tired of the same story being told about Africa and Soweto and therefore challenge the stereotypical narratives. For example in their

interviews, I See a Different You often mention that if you look up Soweto or Africa and click on images, all you see are negative images. So they started revisiting all the places that they grew up in and started taking pictures. In this picture you have the collective, the brothers Innocent and Justice and the guy in the middle of the frame is Vuyo. Professionally they work as art directors, and in their spare time they are photographers.

Zamansele Nsele: Who takes these photos?

Andile Buka: They take the photos, with the help of their friends when they are in front of the camera. Ongama is also part of the collective; he is a fashion student. They buy these old second-hand clothes. They tailor them to be appropriate to the look

Zamansele Nsele: Tell me how the past influences their work.

Andile Buka: They show their influence, source their influence from their parents in terms of their clothing style and the car. The Mercedes Benz is old school and nostalgic. Apart from

[...] **Zamansele Nsele: Do they still live in Soweto?**

Andile Buka: Not any more, they live in the northern suburbs.

Zamansele Nsele: Do they take photos in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg?

Andile Buka: Yes they do, they are really close to Soweto. They have been commissioned to have an exhibition in Senegal. They took pictures there; this month they are going to Tanzania, doing the same thing. After that they are going to Norway to celebrate 20 years of the struggle. They have been to Japan, and they are being commissioned by Diesel.

Zamansele Nsele: Do they consider themselves as artists?

Andile Buka: No, not really.

Zamansele Nsele: Are they more like bloggers or social media practitioners?

Andile Buka: Yes, because this is their first exhibition. They have never exhibited in an art gallery space.

Zamansele Nsele: Where can one find these images?

Andile Buka: They have a blog called *I See a Different You*.

Zamansele Nsele: There seems to be an apparent glamour in their portraits, which could potentially be interpreted as a glamorising of poverty in some of their pictures; I mean if you look at subjects in relation to the backdrops, there is a sharp contrast

Andile Buka: Well, I beg to differ because I know the guys. These were taken when they were doing the Diesel campaign.

Zamansele Nsele: Maybe I can say there is a middle class hipster aesthetic, perhaps I am generalising because I don't know their background, I am just reading the image now. I would say that they are middle class guys who go to these places for poverty backdrops which are kind of striking and arresting. To take it further, there is a tension between themselves, the way they are dressed and the background.

Andile Buka: Well that's why they say "I see a different you" because they are commenting on the fact that not everyone that lives in the townships is poor. They are destabilising those stereotypes. They are residents of Soweto; like for example when I first saw this image, the background is Kliptown, Walter Sisulu square and here this guy is holding an iPhone. I think maybe they made it on purpose.

Zamansele Nsele: Is it a conscious decision not to include other people in their photoshoots? Even in the background, the general public, walkers in the background?

Andile Buka: Their images are like this since their inception. They have been asked in interviews; even in my conversations with them, I have often asked for instance, why they don't take photos in a taxi rank, where there are people. They feel that they are the subject that people should focus on. They use a long sense in order to, they give a view or a glimpse to where they are, where they are taking the picture. For instance if they were to use a 50 m lens, we would lose a sense of the location.

Zamansele Nsele: Is it ethically concerning that they are potentially taking photos that glamorise poverty?

Andile Buka: I think in part when one doesn't have a formal education in the arts, that is something that they may miss. As an artist, I think even as an artist, I don't think going to Africa and taking pictures that portray only poverty is equally unproblematic.

Zamansele Nsele: South Africa is at a point of selectively remembering the past. Would you say that this exhibition *Native Nostalgia*, cosmeticises and glamorises apartheid memory?

Andile Buka: I think in the actual book, that is what is highlighted and also in the work of I See a Different You, it is evident. However in Raphael's work, it is not the same. It is hard to pick up one emotion in these images. He uses the native masks in his work. He is from Niger. It is hard for me to come up with one word to describe these works. These images were bought by the Jack Bell gallery in London; we borrowed them for this exhibition.

Zamansele Nsele: I think that this work evokes colonial stereotypes about the easy sexual availability of black women's' bodies. It harks back to the colonial postcards.

Andile Buka: Which is typical if you think about how they are exhibited in London; they love these types of images over there. I think it is bizarre that in 2014, images like these available. They do make the viewer want more. I think that's why they are readily collected. If you think about how most African artists have a market internationally than locally. As soon as they exhibit their first solo show, they are snatched up by a big gallery that is linked to the international market. There is [a] huge market for this kind of work.

On this wall we make a reference to the book. At the opening night we had an interesting guy who said something quite disturbing. We had five of these kinds of umbrellas and we had crates on the floor so people could sit. We had people serving tea and peanuts basically in order

to create an environment for conversation on the book. I was sitting here amongst strangers and interestingly, this guy came up to me and said, “Hey, how are you, can I ask you a question?”

He goes on to ask, “Why do you have the word ‘kaffir’ on the white wall? Don’t you think the wall should have been black and the writing be white? Then it would make sense”. I said, “No, we actually didn’t think that far, but for you to pose that question maybe you have something to share?” Then he said he was generally dissatisfied with the show; it could have been displayed better. So we basically got mixed reactions about the show on the night, but we got more positive than negative feedback.

Zamasele Nsele: *Native Nostalgia* is a polarising book, that carries a controversial concept in post-apartheid South Africa.

Andile Buka: I mean for example, our parents wouldn’t really highlight the positive stuff. The regular narrative is that there were less opportunities for them, and that we have it easy compared to their struggles in the past. There are emotions involved when the subject comes up with parents.

Zamasele Nsele: Then by contrast you get a show like *Native Nostalgia*, which is based on a yearning for a time before some of these young artists were even born. So basically by this logic, they would be yearning for a period that they did not live in. They would not have experienced the daily struggle of having ones dignity eroded by an apartheid state.

Andile Buka: When Jacob Dlamini was here to see the show, he was fascinated by the fact that his book was interpreted visually into an art exhibition. When you read the second paragraph in the book, you get the gist of why it wasn’t well received in this country.

Zamasele Nsele: Jacob Dlamini came to Rhodes University in 2009 where he officially launched the book. There were a couple of dissenting voices at the presentation; I got a general sense that people felt like it was too soon to be engaging nostalgically about that

period. You said something interesting earlier, when you said that to deny that part would be equivalent to denying a part of ourselves.

Andile Buka: It is what I picked up in the book after reading it. I felt I understand where he comes from in a way.

Zamansele Nsele: The enjoyment?

Andile Buka: Yes, we need to accept the good and the bad. To take the good with the bad.

Zamansele Nsele: In those conditions black people could find pockets of enjoyment, and that we could enjoy amidst the brutality, gunshots and tear gas.

Andile Buka: It is a very touchy subject, because it challenges the dominant narrative of the struggle. When referring to the past, parents will often say, “I used to wear this and that, and listen to this kind of music”. But that narrative, it is still always overwhelmed by the dark and gloomy stuff. In our schools as well[...]

Zamansele Nsele: Can you tell me about this work?

Andile Buka: This is work by the Nigerian Nostalgia Project. They encourage Nigerians to submit images taken between 1960 and 1980. It’s sort of like a public social initiative on social media. Basically anyone can upload their pictures on the page and you will have anyone commenting on the uploaded photos. Aron Khon did African studies; he felt strongly about including the work in the exhibit

Zamansele Nsele: Were all the artists here at the opening?

Andile Buka: No, only I See a Different You was here. The Trinity Session helped out to put the show together.

The Trinity Session did a project *When you are in Dakar* based on their trip to Dakar: the video, we unfortunately had to take down.

Zamansele Nsele: What was the general reception?

Andile Buka: I had a lecturer from Wits who said, “I am not too sure, maybe I need to come back again”. A lot of people said they were intrigued.

Zamasele Nsele: Did the artists read the books?

Andile Buka: I See a Different You read the book I am not too sure about Leonce.

Zamasele Nsele: What informed the criteria that was used to select this group of artists?

Andile Buka: I think Aron would be in a better position to tell you; if he were here he would clarify that question. To be honest with you, I only came on board when the idea of the show was already conceived and planned.

Zamasele Nsele: Can you tell me about the Museum of African Design?

Andile Buka: MOAD is a new baby – the building itself was bought about five years ago. The developers didn’t have a clear idea on what to do with the space to make it functional. Aron Khon who was in an exchange programme at Wits at the time, visited Maboneng and came across this building. Aron Khon is the director of MOAD; at the time he was running his company called *African Look Book*. The idea initially was to turn this place into a multifunctional space: a shop, bookstore, exhibition space, then the idea changed when they gave him the go ahead to convert it into a museum. That is when he came this side and started planning and making it fully functional. Because of the scope of the building, the building is big, we couldn’t really rely on the art aspect in order to generate profit. We decided to host events to generate income. The venue allows for it. We generally host year end functions, corporate events.

Zamasele Nsele: Looking at the history of this area, would you say that MOAD is in a gentrified area?

Andile Buka: It’s a cultural hub. We have exhibitions during the week. We host parties during the weekend and from time to time VANSAs hosts their panel discussions here. We are even

planning on including studio space for the artists; we already have two artists in residence. It is quite an interesting spot.

***He takes me to a reading booth where all *Native Nostalgia* books were placed for the audience to peruse**

Andile Buka: So this is a reading spot that we put together for the audience. Many of the books that we left here went missing. We had lots of people sitting here at the opening.

Zamansele Nsele: I am not surprised people took such an interest in the book itself, because at the Rhodes library *Native Nostalgia* is without fail, always checked out. Before I got my own copy, the one time I was lucky to find it on the shelf, the book itself is worn out from heavy reading; most of the pages are dog eared. It's very popular.

Andile Buka: Most of the public art works that you may or may not have seen around Johannesburg are made by Marcus and Stephen – they call themselves The Trinity Session. Apart from that they are on the advisory board of the museum. We are planning on having a café sort of vibe here.

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