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Inyanga enkulu (the great physician): a comparative analysis of the representation of Black women physicians in three television series: Jozi H (2007), Soul City (2014) and Grey's Anatomy (2015-2016)

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ABSTRACT

This study interrogates how fictional Black women physicians are represented through the lens of feminist theory and the study of Black identity. I consider the patriarchal Western male gaze and the stereotypes associated with this portrayal of the Black women physician in three medical television drama series: *Jozi H* (2007), *Soul City* (2014) and *Grey's Anatomy* (2015-2016). The study draws on W.E.B. Du Bois and his analysis of double consciousness in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) where the writings talk back to the Black man who is born in a world where he has to see himself through a double-lens, always explaining himself and his existence based on the 'other'. In applying this text to the contemporary popular television dramas in the study, I concluded that the Black woman physician operates with a triple burden because of the work world; as women enter the profession of medicine, always defining the self in comparison to a former state that asserts itself as *the* authority. I draw on the work of bell hooks and the Oppositional Gaze from *Black looks: Race and representation* (1992), Laura Mulvey's essay, *Visual pleasure and narrative cinema* (2006), Edward Said's concept of the Occident in his essay *Orientalism* (1978) and Achille Mbembe's *On the post colony* (2006). These theorists' schools of thought are applied in unpacking how the lens in television is a great and grand mirror in society, and how, in the form of fictional storytelling, characters are a mirror of society. These theorists focus on gaze, race, postcolonial studies are useful to this study of television and popular culture because it is important that those who are marginalized and misrepresented, speak back to how they are being portrayed and also avert those depictions by creating how they will want to be represented. As a Black filmmaker and actress, I interrogate the ways in which fictional Black women physicians are represented and curated in medical drama series, through the artistic research component of this study, which takes the form of a pilot episode for a fictional television drama series. I advance storylines that aid the matriarch in the storyline by creating multifaceted fictional Black women physicians. The pilot episode seeks to tell the story of the fictional Black woman physician from different viewpoints while averting the use of restricting, repetitive, problematic representations identified in the analysis of the selected case studies as silencing and portrayed under the clout of the patriarchal Western male gaze.