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Representation of Coloured Identity in Selected Visual Texts about Westbury, Johannesburg

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (Dramatic Art).

December 2006

Abstract

In post-apartheid South Africa, Coloured communities are engaged in reconstructing identities and social histories. This study examines the representation of community, identity, culture and historic memory in two films about Westbury, Johannesburg, South Africa. The films are *Westbury, Plek van Hoop,* a documentary, and *Waiting for Valdez,* a short fiction piece. The ambiguous nature of Coloured identity, coupled with the absence of recorded histories and unambiguous identification with collective cultural codes, results in the representation of identity becoming contested and marginal. Through constructing narratives of lived experience, hybrid communities can challenge dominant stereotypes and subvert discourses of otherness and difference. Analysis of the films reveals that the Coloured community have reverted to stereotypical documentary forms in representing their communal history. Although the documentary genre lays claim to the representation of reality and authentic experience, documentary is not always an effective vehicle for the representation of lived experience and remembered history. Fiction can reinterpret memory by accessing the emotional textures of past experiences in a more direct way.

Declaration

I declare that this report is my own, unaided work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts (in the field of Dramatic Art) in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

_____

Phyllis Denise Dannhauser
4 December 2006

Dedication

For my father, Danie Dannhauser, with thanks for his consistent love, help and support.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to my supervisor, Prof. Jyoti Mistry for her patient and inspirational guidance throughout the research process;, Joseph Cotty Hulette Pretorius and Peter Faver of WECODEC for placing the film and other materials at my disposal and for their generous participation in this project, and my colleagues at the University of Johannesburg for their kind support and consistent encouragement. Without their assistance, this research would not have been possible.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This analysis is aimed at critically evaluating the representation of community, identity, culture and historic memory in selected visual texts within the context of the ideological and hegemonic discourse that has perpetuated dominant stereotypes of the Coloured[1] community of Westbury, Johannesburg. The depiction of community by residents themselves and their construction of an imagined ideal identity in post-apartheid South Africa are also explored.

After 1994, South African society has been characterised by a sense of transition. On an economic, social and political level, the landscape has changed dramatically and is still constantly changing. This sense of perpetual transformation is not exclusive to South Africa, however, and Homi Bhabha (1994:1) characterises the times we live in as follows: "Our existence today is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the 'present', for which there seems to be no proper name other than the current and controversial shiftiness of the prefix 'post': *postmodernism, postcolonialism, postfeminism…"* To this succession of 'posts' can be added another, more definitive marker of a passage to a new era: *post-apartheid* South Africa (my italics).

[1] The word 'coloured' is polemic and several Coloured authors, notably Richard Rive, have condemned its use as an official category. (Lewis 2001:135) In the absence of a more appropriate description and in the interests of allowing the central argument of this paper to flow, a decision has been taken to use this term here. The use of the capitalised designation "Coloured" and other racial classification groups throughout this document is an attempt to align the terminology of this paper with the terms used in the classification documents of the apartheid government, which are germane to this enquiry. Several scholars, most notably Wallerstein (Balibar & Wallerstein (Eds.) 1998, pp.72-74) have discussed the usage of this word to refer to the mixed race population, as well as the appendage "so-called" which became fashionable in the transitional period after the first democratic elections, but has since fallen into disfavour (see next footnote).

The so-called 'Coloured'[2] community has traditionally inhabited that shadow-world between definitions of race and class. Notions of community, culture and identity have been tenuous, negotiated in an environment of exclusion and stereotyping. In post-apartheid South Africa, the construction of a unified 'imagining' of community and individual identity has become fraught with problems of race, struggle credentials, politics and past history.

The difficulty in imagining a communal identity is compounded for the Coloured community in South Africa by the fact that race has always been used as a marker of difference. During the apartheid era, the position of Coloured communities, and Westbury in particular, was circumscribed by the politics of segregation. This marginalisation was exacerbated by the 'justifiable' view from the outside, based on evidence of police records and media reports, of Coloured culture as violent and unstable. To sustain its vision of itself as ethical, pure and democratic, the dominant apartheid regime was invested in viewing the Coloured community as 'other', removed from the mainstream of society (physically and socially) and dangerous. This exclusion was compounded by the ambiguous position of the Coloureds in the racial hierarchy of the time. Although the community could not be comfortably classified in terms of the racial binary, their experience was of segregation and subjugation, as was the experience of all 'Non-Whites'. In some cases, this spurred Coloureds to 'try for White', crossing the 'boundary' between races and living as White people in a society where this gave them access to privileges reserved for the dominant racial group. After the political

[2] For the rest of this paper, the designation "so-called coloured" is avoided. James (1996:41) discusses the use of this term, and the implications of its use by groups other than coloureds themselves, and points out that it has become loaded to the point of rendering it meaningless.

transition in 1994, being (or remaining) part of the Coloured community is a self-determined choice. There is the opportunity for agency, for choosing a real identity above a politicised identity based on apartheid classifications, for choosing whether to "occupy this category that was created by apartheid" (Zegeye, 2001:188).

The community of Westbury, like other Coloured communities in South Africa, has always lived life on the margins – apart from being physically marginalised when they were forcibly removed from Sophiatown, this community has shared in the experience of being socially and racially excluded from the mainstream of society, but never quite to the same extent as Black Africans. In addition, they have always been widely regarded as racially mixed, and therefore hybrid. When hybrid communities reflect on their own culture and social circumstances and try to imagine themselves in different ways, perceptions of identity and community become more difficult to pin down, especially in times of social upheaval and change. In what is sometimes a painful process, representations of community and identity in these circumstances also become open to revision, shifting as people revise their perceptions of the circumstances of their lives. [3]

After 1994, the Coloured community in Westbury has been able to explore different ways of defining themselves and the ideological framework of the country has made it possible to imagine an alternative construction of 'Coloured identity'. It remains to be seen whether this shift in the ideological framework has led to a different definition of community and a different approach to the problems of racial identity.

[3] Saun Field (2001) has interviewed Coloured people about this process of reconstructing identity and their memories of the past, and gives insight into the laborious process that the building of hybrid identities can be.

What imagined communities are emerging from the post-apartheid environment? Are the residents of Westbury indeed defining themselves differently and what are the qualities emerging from these new definitions? Is the community still trapped in nostalgia for an imagined, pre-1994 identity, which defined their differences and unique characteristics, while simultaneously marginalising them socially? Have new identities emerged, or is the romanticised imagining of past criminal glory and brotherhood still lingering in the social memory?

Westbury is also referred to as 'Western' by residents. It is a suburb in the western part of Johannesburg, west of Mayfair and south of Sophiatown. The residents, who in the pre-1994 era would have been classified as 'Coloured', were some of the lesser-known victims of the forced removals in Sophiatown, some 50 years ago (Unterhalter, 1987:64). This community has been the subject of several media investigations and documentaries in the past, most of which focused on the problems of crime, violence and gangsterism which were rife in the suburb until 2001. Despite the fact that Westbury is situated less than 5 kilometres from the National Broadcaster, the SABC in Auckland Park, the area has not been the subject of media scrutiny to any great extent. Newspaper reports usually focus on the problems of crime, violence and gangsterism which were rife in the suburb until 2001 and which still continue, albeit to a lesser extent, today. [4]

In 2001, an initiative by churches in Westbury led to a reconciliation rally, where gangsters asked for forgiveness from their victims' families and vowed to change their lives.

[4] A SABINET search on the SA Media database for the word "Westbury" produced 154 results, of which more than two thirds dealt with problems of gangsterism, violence, drugs and alcoholism. The remaining third were mainly about community initiatives to address these social ills.

The two main gangster groupings, the Fast Guns and the Spaldings, virtually dissolved in the aftermath of this attempt at peace and reconciliation and several of the ex-gangsters have turned to other means of income-generation.

Some have also been trained in film and television production, and one of the products of their venture into media production forms part of this study. *Westbury, Plek van Hoop,* produced in 2003 by these ex-gangsters under the auspices of WECODEC (Westbury Community development and Education Centre), reflects their views on the transformation of Westbury, which they have been part of and hope to perpetuate. The dissolution of the two main gangs has, ironically, also led to a situation where young people are finding it even more difficult to construct an identity and sense of social belonging than before.

A close reading of two films will reveal how the community has chosen to represent itself and reassess its position. This will be done by analysing a documentary and fiction text: the documentary *Westbury: Plek van Hoop (2003)* and *Waiting for Valdez (2002),* a short film scripted by Teddy Mattera, who has strong roots in Westbury. In addition, sections from transcripts of personal interviews conducted with members of the community by the filmmakers during the production of *Westbury, Plek van Hoop,* will also be used to clarify the position of residents *vis-à-vis* the representation of their culture and social environment. The reading of the above texts will also investigate how memories of the past influence perceptions of post-apartheid realities.

By doing a close reading of the films, an analysis will be made of emergent constructions of culture and identity represented in the films and interviews. These constructions not only challenge the dominant

representation of the past, but also represent a 'remembering' of past disappointments and struggles which may offer a glimpse of a more sombre vein of community memory. As Bill Nichols (1991:265) asserts, "History is where pain and death occur but it is in representation that these facts and events gain meaning".

Examination of the ways in which residents of Westbury have documented their own social circumstances and cultural framework will enable us to determine how their representation of themselves is informed by the constructs of their 'imagination' of culture, community and identity. This 'imagining' is, in my view, informed and constructed through their definition of their own 'otherness' or 'difference', how they distinguish themselves from and define themselves in relation to other communities in post-apartheid South Africa. The aim of this study is to interrogate how these films reflect this quest for self-determined identity, and to compare how members of the Westbury community have considered their ability to define an identity in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa.

The analysis of both a documentary and a short fiction film enables the investigation of the documentary genre in representing remembered histories. Documentary is, in theory, regarded as a vehicle for actuality.[5] The close indexical relationship between the film image and 'The Real' easily seduces the viewer into believing in the truth of the representation

[5] John Grierson famously described documentary as "The creative treatment of actuality" (Rabiger, 2004:22), but his qualification of this definition bears scrutiny. Apart from this statement, Grierson also writes "We pass from the plain (or fancy) description of natural material, to arrangements, re-arrangements, and creative shapings of it". (Plantinga, 1997:27) The ability of documentary to capture "The Real" has been debated throughout the history of documentary theory. Authors such as Eric Barnouw (1974, 1983, 1993) and Carl Plantinga (1991) have focussed on how diversely filmmakers have treated this idea of documenting reality. Bill Nichols (1981, 1991), Alan Rosenthal (1988), Michael Renov (1993) and Stella Bruzzi (2000) have signalled the complexities inherent in the assumption that documentary can, or indeed should, represent reality.

(Nichols,1981). However, we should be cautioned by Michael Renov's statement about the "inadequacy of representational systems as a stand-in for lived experience" (Renov,1993:7). Renov is implicitly alluding to all representational systems, not only documentary. The close reading of both films enables us to investigate which genre could be more appropriate as a vehicle for representing remembered history and community identity – documentary or fiction.

In attempting this study, I am very aware of my position as an outsider, an observer and critic reliant on theoretical constructs, mainly conceptualised in the Western academic tradition. Desai (2001:16) alludes to the criticism levelled at colonial studies by certain African theorists and the criticism of post-structuralism by Megan Vaughan. He takes an optimistic view, pointing out that it would be useful for Africanists to engage with both the insights and limitations of post-structuralist thought.

I am, however, cautioned by Achille Mbembe's criticism of recent Western anthropology, history and feminist writing. The central dilemma in speaking about "the African human experience" is, according to Mbembe (2001:1), that this experience "… constantly appears in the discourse of our times as an experience that can only be understood through a negative interpretation…" Africa is never seen as possessing things and attributes properly part of "human nature". He points out that the recognition of a common humanity, of an "I" in a person that is completely foreign, has "almost always posed virtually insurmountable difficulties to the Western philosophical and political tradition" (ibid: 2).

He points out how recent criticism "inspired by Foucauldian, neo-Gramscian paradigms or post-structuralism problematise everything in terms of how identities are 'invented', 'hybrid', 'fluid', and 'negotiated'. On the pretext of avoiding single-factor explanations of domination, these disciplines have reduced the complex phenomena of the state and power to 'discourses' and 'representations', forgetting that discourses and representations have materiality. The rediscovery of the subaltern subject and the stress on his/her inventiveness have taken the form of an endless invocation of the notions of 'hegemony', 'moral economy', 'agency', and 'resistance'" (Mbembe, 2001:5).

> This arises from a refutation of rational agency on the part of African subjects. Scholars subscribe to a narrow understanding of development and modernisation at the expense of detailed analysis of African society as a society which functions like any other. The discussion is not concerned with comprehending the political in Africa or with producing knowledge in general, but with social engineering. As a general rule, what is stated is dogmatically programmatic; interpretations are almost always cavalier, and what passes for argument is almost always reductionist … To judge from recent academic output, sub-Saharan Africa, wrapped in a cloak of impenetrability, has become the black hole of reason, the pit where its powerlessness rests unveiled. Instead of patient, careful, in-depth research, there are off-the-cuff representations possessed and accumulated without anyone's knowing how, notions that everyone uses but of origin quite unknown..."
>
> Mbembe (2001:7-8).

The above statements speak for themselves. I hope that this study can avoid these pitfalls.

Apartheid society was structured on the notion that the experience of being human was different for different groups of people and these groups could be unmistakably categorised in terms of race and convenient divisions of 'culture' or 'tribal affiliation'.

If the people on the other side of the racial divide had a sense of self, this was an impenetrable mystery to most of the dominant class. The sense of self in suppressed communities was circumscribed by the dominant discourse of the time – the ruptures in identity formation under colonialism and oppression are clearly articulated by Frantz Fanon (1986/1957) and Homi Bhabha (1994). In his introduction to Fanon's seminal work *Black Skin, White Masks*, Bhabha dares to ask the virtually unaskable question: "How can the human world live its difference? How can a human being live Other-wise?" (Fanon,1986/1957:xvii). This is the question that communities in transition all over the world are grappling with, even when they have not been subject to the marginalisation and suppression which apartheid visited on those whose difference was physically visible (or, in some cases, determined by heritage in the absence of physical markers), determined along racial lines.

The community of Westbury have had to construct meaning about their identity and place in broader society within a certain discursive formation. This discursive formation was invested in marginalising the community on grounds that would not appear to be solely based on race. Thus, under apartheid and for some time afterwards, the dominant regime was invested in perpetuating a representation of gangsters by 'knowledge' which was circulated about Coloured people – information which supported the current political ideology and justified the marginalisation of the community. This interplay of power and difference will be revealed in a close reading of the films under analysis, with a view to determining how the Westbury community has negotiated this interstitial, fluid space where identities are shaped and formed according to the cultural and social context of the moment. Have they reached a state where it is possible to live "Other-wise"?

Chapter 2: The Context of Coloured Identity

Defining Ethnicity and Race

Much as one would like to remove race from discussions of identity and community, this is impossible in the context of South African society, where race has permeated every level of social discourse, and continues to do so. In the light of our history, one cannot examine community, cultural and social identity in South Africa without considering race and ethnicity. (Alexander, 2006:8).

When attempting to distinguish the Coloured community in South Africa from other South Africans, one is immediately confronted with a dilemma. There is, in essence, no such a race as 'Coloured' – it was an appellation which was created by the apartheid system, and which forced heterogeneous groups to live in communal spaces. In time, the process of living together and sharing in stigmatisation and separation forged a sense of community amongst South Africans classified as 'Coloured' that was based on their assigned difference from other South Africans (Martin, 2001:249). Furthermore, in South Africa, especially in the latter years of apartheid, the term 'community' was sometimes regarded as too culturally and politically laden to be useful as a definition[6]. There are two reasons for its use here. First, we are dealing with a Coloured community, which has traditionally been difficult to define in terms of race alone. The term 'community' is therefore more useful when grouping

[6] Under apartheid, the term 'community' was often used interchangeably with others which were perceived as less acceptable, such as 'tribe', 'Coloured' or 'migrants', in an attempt to obfuscate the connection between racial definition and segregation or marginalisation. The notion of 'communities' or 'cultural groups' which voluntarily grouped themselves separately from others so that they could practice their 'communal cultures' was widely propagated and used to justify practices of exclusion and displacement. This 'new racism' based on the supposed incompatibility of cultural traditions also emerged in Britain in the late 1980s. (Donald & Rattansi, 1992:2).

together a diverse segment of the population in terms of its shared experience. Secondly, the term 'community' is effective in that it recognises the diversity and fluidity present in most groups of people.

Racism is core to any discussion of the representations of a dominant view of communities or people in apartheid South Africa. Benedict Anderson has pointed out how groups in power can view colonised communities and alienate them in terms of 'difference', be that race, class or customs: "The fact of the matter is that nationalism thinks in terms of historical destinies, while racism dreams of eternal contaminations, loathsome copulations: outside history" (Anderson 1997:149). This is closely allied to notions of how, under apartheid, 'culture' and 'community' became politically laden terms that masked the intrinsic racism of the system. "This racism was defined by its strong culturalist and nationalist inclinations" (Gilroy, 2000:32). The idea of nationality and belonging to a larger social context became closely linked to consciousness of race.

The idea that group identity can be determined by race continues to be a contested and contentious one. Basing classifications of people purely along racial lines is a slippery slope, as the masters of the apartheid regime were to find out. Cornell & Hartmann (1998:22) put it succinctly: "If biologically distinct human races do exist, it seems odd that there is so little agreement on what they are."

Sarah Nuttall (2000:16) is critical of the way in which studies of identity in South Africa have focussed on race as a marker of difference and therefore identity. She identifies the central paradox of this way of thinking, where the "overwhelming presence of race as a master signifier of the South African apartheid experience" has coloured thinking about culture, identity, and subjectivity: " If 'race' itself is a genetic fallacy, how

does it continue to dominate imaginings of identity?" And yet, cultural debates in South Africa have traditionally been "…tied to an identity politics based on visibility: a visibility largely reliant on the markers of race"(ibid: 16).

Many sociologists and cultural theorists expected racial and ethnic identities and attachments to become less important as a basis for human consciousness in the latter half of the twentieth century. With the influence of strong global forces such as trade, migration and technology, it was assumed that the world could look forward to a multicultural and multi-ethnic future where all would be freed of parochial connections to ethnicity or tribe, with access to common knowledge systems and cultures, in a common language, which would lead to "a broadened consciousness of self and society" (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998:7). This has not been the case. The importance of ethnicity has been on the rise worldwide, constantly becoming more diverse and powerful a concept, and this increase in importance has occurred with "unexpected persistence and power" (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998:4). While the focus on race and ethnicity has sometimes had violent consequences, it frequently often emerges simply as a retelling of stories or staging of gastronomic or cultural rituals. Communities have not only held on to their ethnicity, but have transformed and shaped it to conform to their current context.

The word 'ethnic' is based on the Greek word *ethnos,* meaning nation. Originally used to denote a specific people or group of people, it has evolved over time to refer to the way in which peoples define others, but also how they define themselves.

According to Max Weber (cited Cornell& Hartmann, 1998:16-17):

> We shall call 'ethnic groups' those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonisation and migration.
>
> Weber (1998:16-17)

He continues, importantly, with: "It does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists." It is crucial to note that this definition denotes a subjective activity of identification, a belief in some commonality of history or descent which was later revised to include a focus on commonly shared culture, as well as on the activities of the group in the present. In the case of Westbury, the community has lived in communal spaces, shared schools and churches for fifty years, and this commonality would override an actual blood relationship. The persistence in a primordial belief in kinship is discussed below, as this also has a powerful influence on the construction of a communal bond.

Whereas race is usually marked in some way by physical difference, ethnicity is very often connected to cultural difference (Fenton, 1999:4; Heath & McLaughlin, 1993: 15). This cultural heritage could include commonly shared ancestry, language markers, or national or regional origin:

> ...we should understand ethnicity as a *social process*, as the moving boundaries and identities which people, collectively and individually, draw around themselves in their social lives. Central to this process is the production and reproduction of culture, of acknowledged ancestry and ideologies of ancestry, and the use of language as a marker of social difference and the emblem of a people.
>
> Fenton(1999:10)

In regarding identification with a certain ethnicity as a social act, Fenton is also emphasising the changing and fluent nature of this kind of identification, as well as the fact that the factors upon which people base their sense of connection could be quite murky and emotional. Cornell and Hartmann (1998:20) put it very well: “Ethnicity is family writ very large indeed.” And, like the family you reluctantly invite for Christmas, you sometimes don’t really know exactly what it is that binds you together.

Wallerstein (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1998:78) continues by pointing out that, in the construction of an identity (or, as he terms it, ‘peoplehood’), groups can call upon genetic characteristics, socio-political history or norms and values that are regarded as traditional. This is a deceptively simple process: “Nothing seems more obvious than who or what are a people” (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1998:70).

It immediately becomes clear how each of the areas so crucial to drawing boundaries of identification (race, language, socio-political history, tradition), seems to have been fraught with obstacles for the Coloured people under apartheid. In terms or acknowledged racial ancestry, the early history of miscegenation, which was clouded in conjecture and secrecy and subject to moral censure, often prevented communities from celebrating a shared lineage. In fact, Jane Battersby (in Wasserman, 2003:123) reiterates the views of Field (2001) and Rasool (1996) about the negative identity constructions of Coloured people, which she attributes to “The lack of acceptance by white and black populations, coupled with the lack of positive historical representation,…”. This negative self-perception will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, when the films are analysed. With regard to how people remember their personal history and construct identities based on this remembering,

Fenton (1999:9) has remarked how "…ancestry is socially constructed and culturally elaborated." People will choose which ancestors to remember, which to forget, and how they will represent these ancestors in their stories. This is a key element in the processes of memory, which are so important in the representation of a group identity.

Etienne Balibar notes two key factors in the production of ethnicity, namely "language and race". (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1998:98). He does point out, however, that language alone cannot produce ethnicity. In terms of language, the most commonly spoken language amongst Coloureds was Afrikaans, which became a political flashpoint in the 1970s and 80s, as it was also the language of their oppressors. Spatially, Coloured history is no less fraught, their national or regional origin being prescribed in a series of displacements and forced removals. In the case of Westbury, the forced removal of the community from Sophiatown on 9 February 1956 looms large in all accounts of their shared history, and the trauma of that displacement still permeates their perceptions of themselves, their community, and the place where they live. (Unterhalter, 1984:64) The cultural tradition of the Coloured community is a much-debated issue which is discussed more extensively below. It is sufficient to note here that culture, in the case of the Coloured people, is an extremely unreliable and politically contentious basis for the construction of a group identity.

In the face of the difficulty of clear racial or ethnic identification based on factual heritage or spatial roots, it seems that constructing a community based on historical, spatial and cultural ties continues to be problematic. We therefore hope that the communal bonds that developed through subjective identification with Weber's "memories of migration and colonialisation". (Weber, cited Cornell & Hartmann, 1998:16-17), can lead

to a concept of ethnic and communal identity in post-apartheid South Africa. It is these memories which, more than anything else, bind people together.

Immanuel Wallerstein's discussion of how the past is crucial to the construction of identity is a key to unlocking the functioning of memory when communities try to reconstruct identities. Communities need to look back at a communal history to enable them to imagine the shape of their present: "The temporal dimension of pastness is central to and inherent in the concept of peoplehood" (Balibar & Wallerstein,1998:78). This sense of the past influences the way that communities act in the present, crucial to socialisation of individuals, "…the maintenance of group solidarity, in the establishment of or challenge of social legitimation." Pastness is therefore inconstant and ever changing, whereas we tend to cast physical history in stone. The social past, according to Wallerstein, is "…inscribed at best in soft clay" (ibid: 78) The implications here for the fixing of meaning, the capturing of the very nature of the 'difference' of Coloured people, are obvious. With the history of Westbury ambiguous and fraught with displacement, this temporal past is difficult to pin down, and therefore the establishment of group solidarity, with the resultant construction of coherent identities, is compromised.

Wallerstein concludes by pointing out that the process of constructing "peoplehood" is in essence political: "…it makes little difference whether we define pastness in terms of genetically continuous groups (races), historical socio-political groups (nations) or cultural groups (ethnic groups). They are all peoplehood constructs, all inventions of pastness, all contemporary political phenomena" (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1998:79).

When the racial classifications and marginalisations, and the ruptures in "peopleness" in apartheid society are thrown into this potent mix, we have an explosive situation where the traumatic processes of identity construction become more laborious than we could ever have imagined.

Although the concept 'ethnicity' could denote an externally assigned signifier of fixed difference, there is also a more personal process of defining ethnicity and constructing a self-determined ethnic identity as described by Heath & McLaughlin (1993:14): "Ethnicity may be a subjective belief that a group holds regarding its common membership because of shared descent or historical background and similarities of customs, language, and sometimes of physical type." They caution, however, that "...the cultural and linguistic features that mark the boundaries among groups from the perspective of outsiders may not be acknowledged by those enclosed within them". Thus, even though outsiders may assign an ethnicity to members of a certain group, this may not necessarily correlate with their self-determined identification with specific groups, although what others say about us may influence our own conceptions of ourselves and our self-determined ethnicity. (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998:20)

If ethnicity is primarily about culture, then we need to examine the concept of Coloured culture in more detail. Cultures, and by implication cultural identities, are not fixed or attached to specific groups but "contested and variable" (Fenton, 1999:9). Brah also points out, "…our cultural identities are simultaneously our cultures in process", (Brah, 1992: 143), which would imply a state of continual transition and flexibility in the determination of a sense of community.

Denis-Constant Martin has clearly defined the polemic nature of a notion of 'Coloured culture'. (Martin, 2001: 255-6) Working class groups, before 1948, revealed inventiveness and communal solidarity in cultural manifestations like the New Year carnival in Cape Town. After 1948,anti-apartheid activists rejected these festivals (which had been manipulated by the authorities) as crude displays of the servility of the 'servants' to their White 'masters', reinforcing the stereotype of the 'happy Coon'. Coloured culture was seen as constructed in collusion with the authorities to reinforce dominant ideologies.

After 1994, activists and intellectuals have shown renewed interest in cultural manifestations, probably in an attempt to investigate anew the creativity, resilience and optimism of communities vying for a place in a 'new' South Africa. Thus, visions of the Coloured position within the South Africa cultural sphere were always very complex and continue to be so after the demise of apartheid. (Martin, 2001: 254) The debate between those who have embraced what they perceive as a unique cultural heritage which binds the community together, and those who see the very idea of Coloured culture as entrenching separation and playing into the hands of the apartheid authorities, continues to this day. Martin notes that it is mainly the intellectual elite who engage in this kind of interchange however, and that the majority of working-class Coloured people continue to live in the areas where they were previously forced to dwell, and have to a large extent internalised the stigmatisation of the past. In the face of continuing social problems such as unemployment, alcoholism, drug addiction and gangsterism, they look to social occasions and celebrations to strengthen communities and give a sense of unity. (Martin, 2001: 251).

Coloureds in South Africa came into contact with diverse groups of people after their arrival at the Cape as slaves, where they formed the original core of the Coloured population of South Africa (Martin, 2001: 251). By the mid 1800's they had formed a group whose sole connection was that they were of mixed parentage, and since they lived in close proximity to each other, they had to 'invent' a common lifestyle "which helped to interpret the world through a new but common prism". In the process, differences between groups were also crystallised, with some groups distinguishing themselves from the rest as an 'elite', mainly on social, intellectual and economic grounds. (Martin, 2001: 252) This gave rise to an interesting situation that echoes Homi Bhabha's description of how oppressed communities emulate their oppressors in order to be recognised as 'civilised'. Bhabha describes this process of psychic identification, and the ambivalence produced by the cultural alienation of the colonial condition, as a condition where it is impossible for coherent identities to be constructed, either from within or without (Bhabha in Fanon, 1986/1957: xii). The colonial condition is a site of becoming, a space of splitting where the image of the Black body is defined by the relationship with the coloniser, the desire to emulate the coloniser and thereby increase 'difference' from the true self:

> …the question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a self-fulfilling prophecy – it is always the production of an 'image' of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image
>
> Bhabha (in Fanon, 1986/1957: xvi).

A key to distinguishing the different ways in which 'race' and 'ethnicity' function is the fact that racial categories are usually assigned by outsiders more readily than by the subjects themselves, whereas ethnic identification is by definition a subjective process. (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998:27)

If, as Cornell and Hartmann (1998:19) assert: “An ethnic group is self-consciously ethnic”, then the Coloured community of Westbury is developing a sense of self and a consciousness of how to shape their future, based on the history of exclusion and displacement which they share. In claiming a specific ethnic identity, the community is retracing the boundaries that separate them from others, and arriving at a new definition that simultaneously defines them and distinguishes them from others. (Ibid: 20). This is not a simple process, but fraught with uncertainty: The site of personal identification, asserts Bhabha, the “image”, is a site of ambivalence. It is the representation of something that is absent, it is spatially split. It is only possible to access the image of identity in the negation of any “sense of originality or plenitude, through the principle of displacement and differentiation” (Bhabha, in Fanon, 1986/1957: xviii).

In striving towards a definition of race, it is more difficult to come to a clear conclusion. The problems inherent in a biologically essentialist definition of race have been exhaustively discussed by several theorists (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998; Gilroy, 2000; Woodward, 1997) and need no further elucidation here. The social construction of race is easier to trace through history and has been succinctly described by Cornell & Hartmann(1998:23-24) : “Races, like ethnic groups, are not established by some set of natural forces but are products of human perception and classification… a race is a group of human beings socially defined on the basis of physical characteristics”.

These physical characteristics are however not easy to pin down, and especially so in a situation where different races have intermarried with other races over a prolonged period, as with the Coloureds in South Africa. As Paul Gilroy (1997:309) observes, although the signs of

difference may be obvious, they refuse to "obey a simple, binary logic. Colour, skin, hair, features, height, weight, cranial size – all remain stubbornly contrary signifiers".

Heath & McLaughlin cite some historical examples outside the colonial context of the absurdities of assigning racial characteristics to members of certain groups: for example, in the late 1800's, people from Wales, Scotland, Ireland and Cornwall were designated "…racially separate from the British" and those of Western Ireland and Wales were further labelled as 'Africanoid'". (Heath & McLaughlin, 1993:15) According to Cornell and Hartmann (1998: 32), the Irish, though the same colour as the British, were regarded as inferior, almost sub-human by the British and the racial classification of Irish immigrants to America was much debated. These examples serve to highlight the often arbitrary nature of racial classification. Several other theorists have also indicated how unreliable physical and biological characteristics are as a means of distinguishing between different groups, their race or ethnic affiliation. (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1998; Cornell & Hartmann, 1998; Donald & Rattansi, 1992; Gilroy, 1997).

Zimitri Erasmus (2001:18-19) has discussed the racial categories within which Coloureds were classified. Apart from the idea of racial mixture, a persistent trope in the way in which Coloureds have been represented, stereotyped and classified is what Erasmus calls "…colouredness as a residual entity" (ibid:18). Thus, the Population Registration Act No 30 of 1950 defined 'Coloured' as neither White nor Native[7], and this concept of 'Colouredness' as floating midway between the Black and White was

[7] Richard van der Ross also takes issue with the ambiguity of racial classification which is evident in this description. He uses it as a basis for his argument that Coloureds in fact share all the cultural characteristics of Whites, and that Coloured identity is a "myth". (Van der Ross, 1979)

"…was given institutional expression in the ambiguous position accorded coloured people in the racial policies of United Party segregation, Verwoerdian apartheid and Botaha's tri-cameralism" (Erasmus, 2003:18). While full participation in society was withheld due to their "non-White" status, Coloureds nevertheless were accorded some privileges above Blacks. "This legacy deeply shaped the ways in which coloured identity was seen in terms of servility and collusion with apartheid". (ibid:18).

Under apartheid, membership of racial categories was not completely exclusive, however, and there are several accounts of reclassifications between groups. In her autobiographical novel *Kroes* (2005), Pat Stamatélos relates how, on the basis of a father and mother who were 'half White', she and her siblings qualified for reclassification as 'White' in 1960's South Africa. She unmasks the trauma such a decision unleashes, with the confusion and fear that accompanied attempts to cross the racial divide in the height of apartheid. It seems that a few drops of 'White' blood were sufficient for reclassification if you appeared White enough. Van der Ross (1979:47) shows that in the period 1972-1975, more than 200 people were classified from other groups to Cape Coloured, 103 persons were reclassified from Cape Coloured to White, and a total of 79 appeals against the Population Registration Act, 1950 were upheld – interestingly, 70 of these were appealing to be reclassified from Black ('Bantu' at the time of writing) to Coloured. In *Waiting for Valdez,* Ous' Nana is waiting to be reclassified as Coloured from Black, staying out of the sun to lighten her complexion. This is the focus of her whole existence, and for the viewer who can see the heartache ahead, her character highlights the suffering caused by the arbitrary nature of racial classifications under apartheid.

Racial classification therefore seemed rigid and clearly circumscribed, but was also severely flawed and sometimes quite random. This becomes clear when noting the number of people who were reclassified. Some of the absurdities of the system also underline how inadequate the categories were to deal with real people in real lives. (Posel, cited Alexander, 2006: 9)

The irrationality of some classifications cannot be regarded in a superficial fashion, however, as they have real consequences for people's lives. Cornell and Hartmann(1998:25) seem quite offhand in their description of the process, but this glib description masks a vast reservoir of suffering which becomes readily apparent when one examines the 'consequences' mentioned: "People determine what the categories will be, fill them up with human beings, and attach consequences to membership in those categories". In apartheid South Africa, the consequences of 'membership' in certain categories were often appalling, and always shaped the striving towards a clear sense of identity and self. It is ironic that the practices of the apartheid government were instrumental in creating bonds of suffering and oppression amongst people, which led to the construction of political 'communities' which challenged the regime. Abebe Zegeye (2001:6) notes, "The political construction of 'communities' through residential and social segregation was perhaps the most significant factor in creating collective racialised identities".

Race and Ethnicity as Markers of Difference

Under apartheid, self-determination was circumscribed by race, and race became a fundamental principle of social organisation and social engineering. In classifying all citizens broadly into four different categories (White, Black, Indian and Coloured), the authorities were also defining the lines of segregation, and determining the political, economic, and social status of each group. The residents of Westbury are, in the main, classified as 'Coloured'. Before 1904, the term 'Coloured' was taken to mean all non-White persons, including 'Kaffirs' or Blacks. The definition of 'Coloured' was revised in 1967, with the Population Registration Act dividing 'Coloured' into six subsections, one of which was 'Indian' (Alexander, 2006:24). Groups were further distinguished in terms of language, and in the case of Blacks, language became a pointer towards a specific 'homeland' or place of origin and subsequent residential segregation. The Coloured population was also subjected to forced removals based on racial classification – the removal from Sophiatown, for instance, was 'segregated' in that Coloureds were moved to Western, or Westbury, and Blacks to Soweto. (Unterhalter, 1987:86) Engineering the movements of people on the basis of their race and deciding which racial group they belonged to was an akward undertaking.

As the apartheid authorities were well aware, attempts to structure society around racial classification were problematic to say the least. The concept of 'race' is difficult to pin down and cannot be approached only from an essentialist biological perspective. Assigning a racial identity becomes an outcome of the power structures in society. Donald & Rattansi (1992:1) cite the definition of Omi and Winant (1986) in an attempt to understand the dynamics of 'race' as a social construct: "'Race' is conceptualised as 'an unstable and 'decentred' complex of

social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle." Any discussion of the concept of 'race' therefore should engage with issues of representation, discourse and power. They point out that when the question of 'race' becomes a question of looking at the structures of power and social practices that produce racism, instead of purely focussing on culture; it becomes possible for analysts to recognise how concepts of race and racism legitimise social practices which reinforce an unequal distribution of power between groups. (Donald & Rattansi, 1992: 3). In a situation like South Africa, where political and social structures were based on a certain concept of the 'race' of individuals, the political, social and personal become enmeshed in a complex web of stereotypes, suppression and struggle.

Deborah Poole makes an interesting link between visual technologies and racial discourse, and shows how visual representations have historically strengthened the emergence of race as a biological and historical fact in the European mind. In her study of Andean imagery, she looks at "the historical intersections between visual and racial discourses (and)…approaches vision and race as autonomous but related features of a broad epistemic field in which knowledge was organised around principles of typification, comparability and equivalency. "(Poole, 1997: 15) In examining how the Westbury community have constructed visual representations about their community, it is possible to see how the principles of typification, comparability and equivalency function in the same way in post-apartheid South Africa as they did in the past. In *Westbury, Plek van Hoop,* the filmmakers have appropriated some of the stereotypical discourses of the past in their representation of the community, discarding some marginal identities from the past in building an ideal vision of Westbury, but marginalising other voices in the process. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

According to Cornell & Hartmann (1998:27-29), when the colonial world became aware of the fact that races different from themselves inhabited the wider world across the seas, this prompted an unprecedented move towards classification, dividing the world into Europeans on the one hand and others who were racially different, and therefore 'other'. The implication of an *inherent* inferiority attached to races other than White was a concomitant effect of this process, which led to the unequal power relations and dissonances in colonial discourse. Whites were seen to represent the norm or what was 'normal' while other races were seen as "uncivilised or pagan or incapable; perhaps more physical and less intellectual or less cultured; and closer to nature, less fully realised in their humanness than those more fortunate in their racial makeup" (ibid: 29) They point out that the concept of race is almost invariably linked to the concept of power, where ethnicity is not necessarily about power (Ibid: 30).

Frantz Fanon (1986/1957) gives a moving description of how colonised people struggle with identity formation and, in the process, dismantles the traditional basis for the naming of race as firmly as Gilroy did in the above description of race as a slippery marker of identity. Fanon disrupts the traditional arrangement of colonial subjects when he points out: "The Negro is not. Any more than the White man" (Fanon, 1986/1957:231). Instead, they define each other, the colonial subject and the coloniser, because they are caught in a complex web of power relations circumscribed by their colonial masters.

In apartheid South Africa, the Coloured people were in an invidious position. During this period, race and assigned ethnicity formed one of the bases for segregation, subjugation and oppression of large portions

of the population, with a biological essentialist view of culture, community and identity forming the backbone of apartheid ideology. The justification for this dominant ideology and its effects was an illusion of “a notion of communities of meaning based on race”. The viability of these “communities” and this racialised identity construction has been rejected as “biologising ideology”, as it creates a situation where “race operates as a metonym for culture at the price of ideology..” (Appiah (1992) cited Azoulay, 1996:132).

However, the Coloured people were not easy to classify, being of mixed race and therefore problematic to the authorities. In terms of culture, their close connections to their oppressors through shared language, musical expression and literature cut across racial divisions and gave rise to cultural expressions which could “traverse all strata of society” (Martin, 2001:259). This led to some confusion, not only as to the categories that could be externally assigned, but also within the community, with Coloureds feeling a sense of common culture with their oppressors, but being prevented from participating in the social and cultural life of Whites.

A discussion on South African society could not be complete without some reference to the dynamics of racism, which was at the heart of the practices of apartheid. Stuart Hall (1992:255) gives some clues on how racism operates “…by constructing impassable symbolic boundaries between racially constituted categories, and its typically binary system of representation constantly marks and attempts to fix and naturalise the difference between belongingness and otherness.” In South Africa, however, the boundaries were not merely symbolic, but politically and legally embedded in the very fabric of society. The existence of racism was consistently disavowed, and the social engineering to which South Africans were subjected attributed to differences in other areas, such as

'cultural heritage' or 'ancestry'. It is a key feature of racism that it is denied on a personal level, even when entrenched in society as it was in South Africa. It would seem that racism operates by displacing prejudice, justifying exclusion of certain groups on the basis of irreconcilable difference in areas other than skin colour, such as heritage, economic status or culture. These are some of the areas which justified the classification of Coloured people as 'other', in the absence of clearly visible differentiation on the grounds of race. The supreme irony is that this 'classification' was also brought about by calling upon markers of difference (culture, heritage, ancestry) which many Coloureds shared with their apartheid 'masters', as mentioned above.

In addition to 'race', concepts such as 'culture' and 'ethnicity' were appropriated by the apartheid regime as markers of difference, which justified classification into specific groups with specific privileges and social standing. These terms were seen as incontrovertible markers of difference. The superficial characteristics of cultures were used as justifications for classification, with ethnicity being seen largely in terms of an assigned ancestry or cultural heritage. The complexities of social interaction and cultural processes were ignored. Brah (1992:143) provides excellent insight in how this process functions:

> Social phenomena such as racism seek to fix and naturalise 'difference' and create impervious boundaries between groups. The modalities of difference inscribed within the particularities of our personal and collective historical, cultural and political experience – our ethnicities – can interrogate and challenge the strangulating imagination of racism but the task is a complex one, for ethnicities are liable to be appropriated by racism as signifiers of permanent boundaries.

Brah cautions that in the process of claiming ethnicities, we risk reinforcing inequalities and strategic essentialism. These permanent

boundaries were definitively drawn in apartheid South Africa. The struggle towards defining a communal identity which the people of Westbury are currently experiencing is therefore also influenced by an understandable reluctance in post-apartheid society to emphasise difference (and the implied drawing of boundaries).

An interesting development in recent years has been the interchangeable use of the concepts of race and culture, where a person's culture could define his or her race to outsiders, and vice versa. Thus culture has become central to the politics of race and "…it has also become more *reductively* conceived, as if it becomes a biological term through its proximity to the concept of race" (Gilroy, 1993a: 57).

An alternative reading of culture would offer solutions to this dilemma, viewing culture not "as flowing into neat ethnic parcels but as a radically unfinished social process of self-definition and transformation" (Gilroy, 1993a: 61). Many post-apartheid communities are engaged in this project, which will hopefully result in new cultural practices which break the boundaries of dominant hegemonies of the past. In the post-apartheid cultural landscape, cultural borrowings and spillage between cultural forms, cultural traditions and collaboration across cultural boundaries seem the order of the day. In this attempt at building the much-vaunted 'rainbow nation', a new concept of 'South Africanness' and 'South African culture' is emerging, although there are differing opinions on what exactly this means, as there is much debate on the nature of a 'South African identity' (cf. Alexander,2006, Erasmus,2001,Nuttall,2000, Zegeye, 2001).

Denis-Constant Martin makes a strong case for viewing 'Coloured' culture as an integral part of South African culture (whatever that may mean). He cites examples from literature, music and other forms of

cultural expression as proof that "…those individuals classified as Coloured…have contributed in creating a South Africanness that transcends the racial and ethnic boundaries imposed by the apartheid state. In other words, Coloured 'structures of signification and comprehension'[8] can be said to exist only insofar as they are fully South African.

By the same token, South African 'structures of signification and comprehension' exist only insofar as they are *mestiza,* that is mixed, which evidently implies Coloured. Neither of them could exist without the connections that bind them. This demonstrates that, finally, South African culture is nothing but *mestiza"* (Martin, 2001: 260)

Abebe Zegeye (2001:188) evokes the relationship between the possibilities inherent in Coloured culture and broader South African society when he states: "The Coloured people of South Africa are sometimes rightly described as its 'living conscience'. They are an ongoing example, warts and all, of what South Africa could have been without apartheid." In fact, Richard van der Ross (1979) is advocating precisely this when he disavows the concept of Coloured identity or a distinct Coloured culture: without apartheid, he is saying, the notion of a separate Coloured identity would not have existed, and all South Africans would have been hybrids celebrating a communal cultural heritage.

[8] Martin's definition of "culture" is based on the discussion by Michel Serres (1975:102-3) of culture residing in the spaces between distinct groupings based on history, myth, science etc. He subscribes to the philosophical idea of culture being a 'web of connections'. (Serres, M (1975) Esthotiques sur Carpaccio, Paris: Hermann.)

Stuart Hall demonstrates that focussing on ethnicity has some use when examining discourses and representation when he asserts,

> The term ethnicity acknowledges the place of history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity, as well as the fact that all discourse is placed, positioned, situated, and all knowledge is contextual. Representation is possible only because enunciation is always produced within codes which have a history, a position within the discursive formations of a particular space and time.
>
> Hall (1992:257)

So, in the same way that the term 'Black' has been reconstituted from original negative connotations and is now used as a celebration of difference, the term 'ethnic' should be rescued from its place in the discourse of multiculturalism, where it was employed in the discourse of racism to disavow the real cause of prejudice. It is also clear in the writing of Steve Fenton on 'ethnie', which is discussed below, that ethnic affiliation can be utilised to group people around shared language, ideals and history to engage in new forms of cultural production, subverting dominant stereotypes and hegemonic discourses. These forms of cultural production would engage rather than suppress manifestations of difference in the construction of new ethnic identities.

It is beyond doubt that the assignation of membership of a certain group by outsiders, whether based on physical characteristics, history or ancestry, can place the individuals concerned in a disagreeable position from which they may wish to escape.

Heath & McLaughlin list instances of "(The) declaration of racial or ethnic membership by political fiat" in countries such as Nazi Germany and South Africa and continue:

> Less easily accounted for historically are the numerous occasions when small groups have chosen to escape the ethnic labels given to them by outsiders by simply moving to another region and adopting different customs of eating, dressing, worshipping, and speaking. In the United States, such shifts have historically been referred to – usually in a pejorative manner – as 'passing', but in other nations of the world, such changes may receive no negative assessment. Instead, they may be recognised as worthy moves to improve one's station in life.
>
> (Heath & McLaughlin , 1993: 15).

In South Africa, the practice of 'passing' was undoubtedly perceived in a negative light by the apartheid authorities, as it subverted the official practice of racial classification and blurred the lines that had been so painstakingly drawn between ethnic groups. This practice was shrouded in secrecy and censure but was still relatively widespread, despite the obvious dangers and trauma involved for the individual. [9] The resultant permeability of the boundaries between races has led to a situation where South Africans today, in some cases unwittingly, have become part of the modern global movement towards generalised hybridity.

To paraphrase Stuart Hall, we are all 'a little bit hybrid':

> While in the 1960s and 1970s we thought we were a marginal diasporic people, now everyone turns out to be a bit diasporic, to have some funny business in their backgrounds. This is the modern experience, what modernity is about.
>
> (Hall & Jacques 1997:35).

The notion of hybridity which is so essential to an understanding of the Coloured community will be discussed below.

[9] See the previous discussion of Van der Ross (1979) and the figures included in his book.

Even after the demise of apartheid, it is no less difficult for South Africans previously classified as 'Non-White' to create a sense of unity with other Black people in the rest of the world. Paul Gilroy (1993a:2) sketches a modern world where religious and political groupings attempt to construct a sense of connectedness, which will ensure 'racial' survival. The bonds formed by reactions to White supremacy and "the historic momentum of subaltern racial identities marked by slavery and colonialism" cannot be called upon for this connection; being Black is no longer (if it ever was) a point of entry into an international brotherhood: "The idea of a common, invariant racial identity capable of linking divergent Black experiences across different spaces and times has been fatally undermined" (ibid., 2) This situation has affected the ways in which Black communities express, reproduce and disseminate their cultures – the process of cultural production has become localised and specific. Rather than an affiliation to a broader imagined group, individuals are more likely to align themselves culturally with their neighbourhood, province or city. On a very superficial level, this kind of localism is evident in the differences that are apparent between the cultural life of Coloureds in Gauteng and those on the Cape Flats.[10]

Denis-Constant Martin discusses the ambiguity of the situation of Coloureds in South Africa, where they consider themselves to be 'non-influential' in the political sphere, even though they were marked by oppression in the same way as Black South Africans. In describing their vision of community, and in particular the New Year celebrations, Coloured people often resort to imagining "…the dream of an ideal world,

[10] See the book series on "Social Identities in the New South Africa", cited in the Bibliography.

where all human beings would be united…District Six is usually presented as the proof that this vision can be real; nostalgic stories tell of the time when even gangsters were kind-hearted" (Martin, 2001: 260). This 'culture' which manifests itself at New Year not only builds on this idyllic vision, but strengthens ties within the community, if not with the world beyond.

The question of 'Coloured identity' is fraught with "ambiguities and contradictions", (Martin, 2001: 261), and in the political sphere the community still has not found a unified voice. The position of the Coloured community "highlights the dilemma of the new South Africa in general: how to define and recognise communities without perpetuating apartheid categories, attitudes and behaviours; how to support communal cultures in a way that will 'bring communities together' instead of setting them apart or even pitting them against one another.'"(Martin, 2001:262)

Marginal Identities in Post-Apartheid South Africa

The position of Non-White South Africans under apartheid bears certain similarities to that of colonised peoples, especially since notions of 'otherness' and racial stereotyping are also crucial in any discussion of colonial relations. In his introduction to Fanon's *Black skin, White Masks*, Homi Bhabha describes the colonial condition as a "state of emergency" but also a state of *emergence*. The struggle against the colonial condition challenges the progressive order of history in Western thought in the same way that the "social and psychic representation of the human subject" is disturbed. "For the very nature of humanity becomes estranged in the colonial condition and from that 'naked declivity' it emerges, not as an assertion of will nor as an evocation of freedom, but as an enigmatic questioning" (Fanon , 1986/1957: xi). Personal

identification becomes an ambivalent process, where it is only possible to imagine an identity by negating any "sense of originality or plenitude, through the principle of displacement and differentiation … It is in this ambivalence, from this shifting boundary of otherness within identity, the shift between being and meaning, that Fanon asks, "What does the Black man want?" (Fanon , 1986/1957: xviii). This process of questioning, searching for some measure of collective identity in a society which was fragmented at all levels, is the project in which communities all over South Africa are engaged in after 1994. Coloured identity is emerging from the stereotypes of the past and a new identity is being constructed. The degree to which this identity is based on memories of past stereotypes, the "pastness" which Wallerstein (Balibar & Wallerstein , 1998:78) finds so crucial to the construction of identity, offers a rich vein of enquiry which will be taken up in the discussion of the films.

In the case of the Coloureds, however, race becomes a very 'slippery marker' and even notions of community and nationhood are somewhat problematic. The only common feature shared by this group (as early as 1838) of very diverse people was "…they were of mixed parentage, that is, descendants of European pioneers and Khoi-San women, settlers and slaves and former 'free black people'…They constituted all those people who could neither be considered White people nor indigenous Africans. (Martin , 1998, cited in Zegeye 2001:8)

In the latter years of apartheid, some discomfort emerged regarding a purely biological view of race, with nation and culture becoming markers for segregation. In speaking of the rise of nationalism, Benedict Anderson (1997:4) points out that "nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind". He investigates the rise of nationalism in the late 18th century and the role of the religious community and dynastic

realm in the formation of common frames of reference. He questions what the cultural forces were that led to the decomposition of these cultural systems and points out how communities constructed meaning around a "conception of temporality in which cosmology and history were indistinguishable," which provided explanations for the fatalities of everyday existence, like death, servitude and suffering (Anderson , 1997: 36). In an uncertain society fraught with ambiguities like apartheid South Africa, the Coloured community would have constructed a sense of 'nation' around their immediate circumstances and lived experience of "servitude and suffering".

Membership of a nation is often linked to ethnicity. The desire for a sense of connectedness to others on the grounds of shared ideals is akin to identification due to perceived shared ancestry, language or history. Nationalism is essentially a political movement, and "…involves the effort by a people to determine their own destiny and free themselves from external constraint, to end internal divisions and unite, and to find and express their authentic cultural heritage and identity" (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998:36). Claims of nationhood are usually made on similar grounds to the creation of an ethnic identity, namely shared heritage, language or cultural history, but with political intent. In the face of exclusion of the majority of South Africa's citizens from political participation under apartheid, the Coloured community have found innovative ways to construct groupings that not only subvert the dominant ideology, but ironically also emphasise the stereotypes about the community as violent and unstable.

The study of colonialism (and, by implication, apartheid), is in essence also an investigation of how groups negotiated the striving for a common imagined belonging while their everyday lives were fraught with divisions

and unequal power relationships. John Comaroff (2001:37) notes that "…the so-called 'anthropology of colonialism' exists, above all else, to interrogate the construction, objectification, and negotiation of *difference.* In recent years, there has been a growing concern with the notions of construction and culture in colonial and postcolonial studies, and Comaroff remarks: "At its most extreme, the grand narrative of colonialism in the Western academy has been replaced by one which treats the phenomenon as protean, almost incoherent" (Comaroff 2001:38) He proposes examining the colonial state afresh, with the aim of determining what exactly the term "colonial state" may refer to. He points out that in the effort to impose order on the "colonies", the colonial "state" differed from its "mother" metropolitan state in Europe in a few key areas. He notes that colonial states could not be seen as "nations", in the sense that whereas the "nation" depended on the "ideological work of manufacturing sameness, of engendering a horizontal sense of fraternity;…" the colonial state was concerned with "…the practical management, often the production, of difference….They dealt with heterogeneity by naturalising ethnic difference and essentialising racial inequality." This fundamentally contradicts the stated aim of colonising nations to "civilise" colonial subject and turn them into "citizens" – it is "the base contradiction of colonialism" (Comaroff, 2001:46). The colonial subjects were prevented from imagining a 'nation' of their own by the institutionalisation of racial stereotypes and the entrenchment of difference in a regulatory system which ensured that they could not imagine themselves as free of the relationship with the coloniser.

However, it is important to note that nations do not arise and continue spontaneously – however natural and eternal they may seem, "…they have been constructed through elaborate cultural, ideological and political processes which culminate in the feeling of connectedness to other

national subjects and in the idea of a national interest that transcends the supposedly petty divisions of class, region, dialect or caste" (Gilroy, 1993a:49) In apartheid South Africa, this sense of connectedness was largely based on shared oppression and opposition to the dominant regime and this led to a common sense of purpose and 'nationhood'. In South Africa, the identity of the Coloured community was largely formed by their experiences under apartheid. (Alexander , 2006) Abebe Zegeye characterises the experience of segregation by oppressed people under apartheid as "..colonialism of a special type", and refers to it very aptly as "identity-assigning colonialism and racialism" (Zegeye, 2001:2-3).

In their article, "Les Enfants De Marx et De Coca-Cola" (1997), Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques investigate notions of culture and identity among people of Afro-Caribbean descent living in Britain, who are nostalgic for their 'African' roots. Because the origins of Afro-Caribbeans, even those living in the Caribbean, are virtually impossible to trace, the complex cultural inheritance of their descendants living in the 'West' mitigates against one unchanging historical or biological notion of cultural identity. This is similar to the position of the Coloureds of South Africa, who also share in the stereotyping of their cultural and social heritage. The history they have has not been recorded, but is based on oral accounts passed on from generation to generation.

Until recently, this hybrid cultural heritage has been seen by the British, and many other 'Western' nations, as somehow inferior, a weakness in the national fibre. This was undoubtedly the case in apartheid and colonial South Africa. In recent times, however, the world has increasingly come to recognise that globalisation has destroyed the notion of a single fixed identity. Increasing cross-cultural communication keeps culture alive and flexible and when the hybrid or mixed identity is

regarded as unacceptable or contemptible, a context is created where: “cultures die (...) they ossify and put up barricades. Cultures live when they take on the people next door, adopt some of their customs, adapt to the new conditions, and thereby create something genuinely new”. (Hall & Jacques, 1997:34)

With regard to nationhood and an imagined ‘belonging’ to a larger state or nation, Monica Brown (cited Ramirez, 2004: 1137) shows how culture can construct itself as a ‘nation-state’. This notion resonates with the way in which alternative ‘nations’ have arisen in many communities, notably gang culture in the Coloured community. Where community life and culture become flawed and disjointed, as was the case under apartheid, the imaginary nation to which young people belong becomes clustered around other activities, economic, social (or anti-social) and sometimes criminal. This allegiance to a gang to create a sense of belonging to a wider context is, interestingly enough, not determined in racial or ethnic terms. The emphasis is on the neighbourhood, on local conditions:

> Young people need to be understood in the context of their gangs, their schools, their families, and their neighbourhoods. Ethnicity and race vary considerably in the extent to which they figure as core features of young people’s sense of themselves and others.
>
> McLaughlin (1993:58)

Vigil (1993:102) refers to the living conditions in urban ghettos and barrios as displaying “multiple marginality”. He notes that the experience of ecological, economic, socio-cultural and psychological marginality prevalent in urban societies under stress, with the concomitant loosening of traditional social control mechanisms, lead to the development of “new forms of street socialisation” (Vigil, 1993:97). Gang membership is an attempt to cope with the stress of living in fragmented communities, to reconstruct a surrogate family and find role models and authority figures

in peers as opposed to parents, school or family. This process has become widespread in many urban communities all over the world where "Under economic strain, adults lost firm parenting skills; in the family, gender roles shifted, especially when females found work outside the home and males did not" (Vigil, 1993: 103). For young males, being part of a gang offers the opportunity of retaining a sense of self which is not rooted in work and family responsibilities, but in a traditional stereotype of masculinity. This perception of what it means to 'be a man' – "tough, unfeeling, courageous, and daring – limits the role choices available to males forced to adjust and adapt to street realities. (Vigil, 1993: 105). It also limits the range of role models that smaller children look up to, and assigns value to qualities which are regarded by outsiders as socially unacceptable.

The description of the activities of Hispanic American gangs could as easily apply to gangs in South Africa and are in many cases normal adolescent activities which include "play, socialising, love and dating arrangements, drinking and doing drugs and being entrepreneurial." Other less socially acceptable activities could include learning how to plan a drive-by shooting, arrange meetings to obtain drugs, and "…to listen at a gang hangout to *veteranos*' war stories of past battles lost and won" (Vigil, 1993:108). This listening to stories, the retelling of the past, has strong resonance in the interviews in *Westbury, Plek van Hoop* and is mirrored in the telling of Valdez's story to the children around the fire. While they tell stories of gunshots and shootings, groups or young men around them are beating each other up.

From outside the community and within, 'gang nations' are liable to be stereotyped and excluded from the flow of community life. In the same way, young people who do not ally themselves with a gang may feel

deprived of role models and be unable to clearly identify with the cultural life in the community. Monica Brown (cited Ramirez, 2004:1137) shows how notions of 'nationhood' or 'citizenship' are only possible through the exclusion and marginalisation of some citizens in the interests of the sanctity and purity of the 'nation' as a whole. So for Whites during and after apartheid, their 'nation' could only be preserved by attributing certain qualities to other communities which justified their marginalisation. Because gangs are perceived in a certain way, the whole community are excluded from the mainstream of society in much the same way as they were under apartheid. An essentialist view of race often informs the process of assigning identity in repressive societies, and this has led to perceptions of the Coloured community being based on the dominant view of gang culture as crime-ridden, alcoholic and non-productive.

In the face of the marginalisation and exclusion of gang culture from the notion of 'nationhood' after apartheid (and before), one would expect that communities implicated in the complex layers of identity in gang culture would turn their backs on the ideals of nationhood. Monica Brown, (cited Ramirez , 2004:1138), notes that Latino gang members have not rejected American nationhood – rather, they have fashioned 'mini nations' of their own in their gang structures and community institutions, emulating the structures from which they are excluded and, in so doing, they "simultaneously mirror and expose some of the most oppressive facets of dominant culture's construction of nation and an American 'symbolic'". In the process, they offer gang members a 'citizenship' of sorts, a 'gang citizenship'.

Suren Pillay (Wasserman,2003:283) argues that the identity of the gangster in the dominant public debate obscures their particularity and specificity. Their identities should be explored as dynamic processes:

> These processes involve locating identity formation within the interface of globality and locality: the symbolic borderlands of a structured contingency, which rings to the fore the constitutive conditions of ambiguity and hybridity.
>
> Pillay (2003:283)

In the case of Westbury, where this 'gang citizenship' has largely become impossible through the dissolution of gangs, the emergence of other forms of social and cultural organisation can be observed. Former gang leaders now espouse religion and sport as the organising structures in society, encouraging young people to turn their eyes from the allure of crime and consumption towards spiritual and physical pursuits. The gang 'community' has been replaced with other social and cultural 'communities'.

Membership of a group or community is also, according to Paul Connerton, who describes how Maurice Halbwachs argued that it is "…through their membership of a social group – particularly kinship, religious and class affiliations – that individuals are able to acquire, to localise and to recall their memories" (Connerton1989:36) In the case of a community where kinship and class affiliations are problematic, membership of a gang community could assist people in recalling, reconstructing and reworking their collective memories – a project that is indispensable when trying to construct communal identities.

Chapter 3: Constructing Identity

Identity as a Social Construct.

The idea of identity as a construction which takes place within cultural, social and historical context is echoed by several theorists (Bhabha, 1994, Hall, 1996; Woodward, 1997, Cornell & Hartmann, 1998) who also point out that identities in the modern world are becoming increasingly fragmented and fractured :

> …never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation.
>
> Hall (1996:4)

Identity is a much discussed and debated concept in modern academic theory and cultural studies, which has in recent times become almost synonymous with the theory and politics of identity and difference.[11] (Grossman, 1996:87) There is a continuous tension between the idea that identity is predetermined by history, ethnicity and environment, versus the notion of identity as malleable, shaped in response to external context, and self-determined. In the modern, and postmodern world we live in, it seems to be more and more difficult to imagine the possibility of 'constructing' an identity.

In contrast to the more traditional concept of the "pilgrim" or "identity builder" described by Bauman (1996:23), charting a systematic course towards a stable, comforting, fixed identity through a desert landscape of his own imagining, the modern traveller confronts an ever-changing

[11] Stuart Hall (1996:1) speaks of a "veritable discursive explosion" around the concept, pointing out that it has also paradoxically been subjected to "a searching critique".

landscape which has lost its continuity and where 'identity' is as disposable and changeable as the world around us: "A world inhospitable to pilgrims". Human relationships are fleeting and long-term commitment has become virtually obsolete or at best unfashionable in a world where rejection and pain seems inevitable. Cultural and community life does not call on a common remembered history to provide continuity – history can only be reconstructed and remembered according to the needs of the moment. In this fragmentary, episodic way of life, "time is no longer a river, but a collection of ponds and pools," and the experience gathered in such a world can offer "no consistent and cohesive life strategy". (Bauman, 1996:25) [12] In this world of shifting sands and uncertain pathways, constructing a sense of community and identity would be difficult enough. In post-apartheid South Africa, it would seem to be fraught with inherited complexities, a laborious process of shaking off the imposed stereotypes and assigned identities of the past.

At the heart of this study is the concept of community identity and the representation and construction of that identity. If one agrees with the notion of culture as a social construct, closely allied to notions of identity and ethnicity, it must be assumed that visual representations of a community will attempt to reflect a culture which has been constructed to

[12] Four "lifestyle choices" are identified by Bauman which function in chorus, and sometimes cacophony, in the post-modern world. He points out that "…the styles once practised by marginal people in marginal time-stretches and marginal places, are now practised by the majority in the prime time of their lives and in places central to their life-world; they have become now, fully and truly, lifestyles. (Bauman 1996:26). The lifestyles are the stroller, meandering through the shopping mall and "telicity" in search of new experience; the vagabond "the bane of early modernity", masterless and constantly on the move and always a stranger (post modernity has reversed the ratio – previously the settled were many, vagabonds were few). Then there is the tourist – a conscious and systematic seeker of experience, wanting to immerse themselves in a strange and bizarre element, but with clearly marked escape routes and a home. The player is involved in an endless succession of games and 'cutting their losses".

re-assess community life, assign new meanings and possibly subvert dominant representations of the past.

In his article, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” (Woodward,1997:51), Stuart Hall discusses cultural identity and representation and points out that the concept of ‘cultural identity’ can be defined in terms of how it reflects common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which “provide us, as ‘one people’, with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history.” The process of construction is reciprocal, and as much as we are determining our own identities, we are assigning certain identities to others on the grounds of their exclusion from our inner circle, often in the form of stereotypes. In investigating stereotypes, the concept of ‘difference’, as discussed by Kathryn Woodward (1997:35), is important. She looks at the production of difference through binary oppositions and sees this as crucial to the study of the cultural construction of identities. Identities are constructed in relation to other identities, in relation to ‘the other’ and/or to what they are not.

She also points out that the definition of identity is subject to historical change and that “different identities may offer resistance to dominant discourses” (Woodward,1997:3). One can distinguish between a ‘biological essentialist’ view of identity, which is based on kinship, shared experience and history and provides an unchanging point of reference, and the non-essentialist, ‘social constructionist’ view. In the latter view, identity is ‘fluid and contingent’, embedded in social context and history. She also points out, “The view that, in order to assert an identity position, it is necessary to lay claim to the truths either of biology and some innate natural qualities, or of recoverable bonds of kinship and a shared history, have a considerable political hold” (ibid.,1997:3).

Stuart Hall (1997:20) presents two ways of thinking about cultural identity. Firstly, communities can attempt to uncover the truth about their shared identity by looking at the 'oneness' of a shared history and culture. This shared culture could then be represented in various cultural forms to reaffirm and strengthen this cultural identity. "Basically, the struggle over representations of identity here takes the form of offering one fully constituted, separate and distinct identity in place of another" (Grossman , 1996:89) The virtual impossibility in the modern world of a fixed, distinct individual identity based on shared history and experience led to the development of a second, more flexible definition. Hall's second model posits a form of cultural identity which is a matter of 'becoming' as much as 'being'. He claims that, although identity does have a history, in laying claim to it we are reconstructing the past and, therefore, the shared history is undergoing constant transformation. This reconstructed past can also be seen as part of the "imagined community" described by Benedict Anderson.[13]

> Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actual identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves'. Identities are therefore embedded within representation and constructed within discourse, produced in "specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies".
>
> Hall (1996:4)

[13] In his 1997 book "Imagined Communities", Benedict Anderson discusses how a community's vision of itself is often not based on reality, but on an image of community which is a group imagining of how it is.

In a society in transformation such as South Africa, the idea of identities in a state of 'becoming', a looking forward to 'what we might become', seems to be the most appropriate way to examine subjectivity and community identity. The specific historical and discursive site which is produced by the dynamics of post-apartheid South Africa has given rise to fluidity in the construction of identities, the representation of those identities and the definition of subjectivities within the broader social context.

Cornell and Hartmann (1998:81) discuss three primary concepts that are fundamental when examining the process of identity construction. Firstly, boundaries are established between members and non-members of a group, using a set of criteria which could include race, cultural practice, ancestry or various other factors. Secondly, it is important to recognize that identities are not constructed in isolation, but emerge from a specific set of social circumstances and relationships. The perceived position of the group therefore needs to be established within its social context. Often, the distribution of power, status and resources will determine how a group positions itself. Lastly and importantly, identity construction always involves "the assertion or assignment of meaning".(ibid.:81) Since we know that meaning is constructed by systems of representation, by examining how identities are represented provides the clues on what meaning is assigned to different groups.

Donald and Rattansi (1992:4) also take the view that culture is produced within specific "systems of meaning, through structures of power, and through the institutions in which these are deployed…" Seen from this vantage point, the implied relationship between culture and race which was constructed in apartheid South Africa is particularly interesting. If the

community and its culture are defined by the power relationship within which they function in society, it becomes clear how outside forces determine not only the physical and economical role which Coloured communities could play in apartheid South Africa, but also their cultural life. Culture therefore becomes, not a tool for the expression of identity, but an indication of the power relationships and processes through which "…communities are defined as such: that is, how they are rendered specific and differentiated." This deprives the community of a cultural heritage distinct from the dominant power structures, and in the process also robs them of the means of constructing an independent community identity. In the absence of written histories which provide the tools to construct a common heritage and cultural identification, as was the case under apartheid and previous colonial regimes, people rely on memory to construct meaning.

Meaning is also intimately connected with how identity is maintained and marked out through cultural practice and how differences between groups are identified. The construction of identity is based on the perception of shared meaning and history:

> The assertion and affirmation of one identity from a range of possibilities always depend on context, for the practice of naming involves positioning oneself in relation to others(…) Underlying struggles over identity are efforts directed toward gaining recognition by others.
>
> Azoulay (1996: 129-30).

This recognition by others implies a certain power relation, however, as both freedoms and boundaries are circumscribed by the formation of a certain identity. Nowhere is this truer than in post-apartheid South Africa. Before 1994, freedoms and boundaries were very explicitly controlled by the state: now, the power relation has shifted and to gain recognition, identities have to be redefined and reconstructed.

Stuart Hall points out how meaning is embedded in discourse. By discourse, he means

> …a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment … Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But … since all social practices entail meaning, and meanings shape and influence what we do – our conduct – all practices have a discursive aspect.
>
> Hall (1992:291)

"Nothing has any meaning outside of discourse" (Foucault 1972, cited Hall 1992:291). Moreover, discursive formations give rise to a particular notion of what the 'truth' is in a specific context and can lead to real consequences if constraints or the effects of this knowledge are visited upon sections of the population: "Each society has a regime of truth …that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true…" (Foucault 1980,cited Hall,1997:49). This 'regime of truth' was meticulously constructed by the architects of apartheid, with certain subject positions assigned to members of certain groups, and the knowledge circulated about those groups being used to justify the resultant discrimination.

Foucault's notion of power as "a productive network which runs through the whole social body" (Foucault, cited Hall , 1997:50) is relevant to the South African situation, where power relations permeated every level of society and every part was connected in an intricate web of knowledge and meaning, which regulated the minutiae of everyday existence for all South Africans. Pockets of resistance against the regime could very easily become engulfed in the overwhelming tide of dominant regulated practice, and the histories of suppressed communities were written in

terms of the meanings that this discourse created. The circulation of power was productive, but only in terms of producing knowledge which is fuelled by the systems and structures of apartheid, with alternative views or knowledge being either suppressed or disregarded.

According to Stuart Hall (1992:4), identities emerge within the play of power, and are "more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally constituted unity – an 'identity' in its traditional meaning." Hall suggests that, although meaning is constructed through difference, it is not fixed and refers to Derrida's notion of difference, with its connotations of meaning as fluid and never quite fixed, always deferred. This position stresses the fluidity of identity and its infinite indeterminacy. Derrida posits that this construction is always based on excluding that which it is not - creating the binaries male/female, white/black, etc. Identity is as much defined by what it excludes, what it is not, as by binding forces such as history or spatial connections. The social construction of identities therefore takes place within "the play of power and exclusion" (Hall , 1996:5). Identities are defined by difference, with the focus on "a multiplicity of identities and differences rather than on a singular identity and on the connections or articulations between the fragments or differences" (Grossman , 1996:89) The implication is that identities are constructed by attaching ourselves to certain subject positions which are created by discursive practices, and in so doing we become part of "structures of meaning". [14]

[14] Stephen Heath (1981) Questions of Cinema, Basingstoke: Macmillan, in Hall and du Gay (1996), refers to this process as suture, where a subject is sutured to a subject-position. Identities therefore become positions the subject takes up while "knowing .... that they are representations, that representation is always constructed across a 'lack', across a division, from the place of the Other, and thus can never be adequate – identical – to the subject processes which are invested in them. This implies agency on the part of the subject, and a process of "articulation" and "identification".

In terms of the construction of identities, Cornell & Hartmann (1998:83) distinguish between what they call “thick” and “thin” identity, which is either asserted or assigned. When identity is assigned by outsiders within the dominant power structure, and at the same time comprehensively organises social life (thick), that identity organises virtually every aspect of daily life and action. In dramatic turnaround, the non-White races of South Africa have been catapulted from “thick”, “assigned” identity to “thin” identity, where identity in itself has little effect on the organisation of everyday social life. The organisation of everyday life is no longer prescribed by the “thick”, assigned identity, and thus this organisation attains new meaning when it is the result of a “thin”, non-assigned identity. The process of reclaiming an asserted identity is the one which communities are currently struggling with after generations of being barred from placing themselves within society freely and assertively. This has deprived communities not only of agency and meaning under apartheid, but left them disempowered in the striving to assert, or even explore, new identities and a place in new social structures.

Lawrence Grossman (1996:97) states that the problem of subjectivity is defining how people fit into the world and how one can locate agency:”…subjectivity …within human societies at least, it is always inscribed or distributed within cultural codes of differences that organise subjects by defining social identities.” These codes place different values on particular subject positions and thus identity becomes a question of social power. The self becomes the material embodiment of differences, historical or otherwise, which are inscribed in society.

Agency, the ability to choose identities and subject positions in relation to others, is determined by social structure and space:

> Agency as a human problem is defined by the articulations of subject positions and identities into specific places and spaces- fields of activity… on socially constructed territories. Agency is the empowerment enabled at particular sites, along particular vectors.
>
> Grossman (1996: 102)

Paul Gilroy challenges an essentialist view of identity and cites the political demands made on the concept of identity in this view, using examples from apartheid South Africa, Rwanda and Nazi Germany:

> In these circumstances, identity ceases to be an ongoing process of self-making and interaction. It becomes instead a *thing* - an entity or an object - to be possessed and displayed. It is a tacit sign that closes down the possibility of communication across the gulf between one heavily defended island of peculiarity and its equally well-fortified neighbours".
>
> Gilroy (1997: 308).

In these circumstances, 'otherness' becomes a threat, where identity is like a marking on the body of the carriers and implicates them in an ideological discourse.

In her essay on postcolonialism, Rita Abrahamsen gives a succinct account of how power functions in postcolonialist discourse. Post-colonialism as a system of academic thought owes much to the post-structuralist perspective of power as productive of identities and subjectivities. This perspective on power, knowledge and discourse … have found particular resonance in analyses of colonial and postcolonial relationships" (Abrahamsen, 2003: 199).

According to Foucault, the traditional view of power as domination has given way to the emergence of systems of power which create subjective positions. Discourses are “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” and this refers to how dominant understandings and representations of the world become dominant and eventually shape the manner in which “a particular aspect of social reality is imagined and acted upon” (Foucault , 1972: 49). In our modern age, power works through culture and society, constructing the space within which we interact through the “construction of a subjectivity normatively experienced as the source of free will and rational agency”. (J Danzelot cited in Abrahamsen, 2003:197)

Frantz Fanon (1968/1957) describes how the desire of the colonial subject to take the place of the White man places him in a position where he can never ‘exist’ as an independent entity. His acceptance as a person is based on making himself different from his peers by defining himself in Western terms as acceptable and, therefore, emphasising his difference from what he once was. So, to be acceptable, he has to counter his ‘otherness’ by becoming ‘different’, or ‘quasi-White’. This leads to a sense of depersonalisation, alienation and displacement in his country of birth. Fanon links this sense of cultural alienation to the ambivalence of psychic identification, which brings a psychological dimension to the process of identity construction.

Frantz Fanon states that, in the colonial condition, everyday life “exhibits a ‘constellation of delirium’ that mediates the everyday life of its subjects: the Negro enslaved by his inferiority, the White man enslaved by his superiority alike behave in accordance with a neurotic orientation” (Fanon,1986/1957: xiv). In this bizarre unstable situation, archaic inert institutions operate like a caricature of fertile institutions and inherent to

the colonial situation is an acceptance of underlying racial hatred and violence. He speaks of “these interpositions, indeed collaborations of political and psychic violence *within* civic virtue, alienation within identity”, as a splitting of the colonial space of consciousness and indicative of a society marked by delirium.

This alienation, the splitting of the space of consciousness, is particularly relevant when examining the workings of identity and subjectivity in communities in the ambiguous position of the Coloured community in South Africa. Fanon could very well be describing apartheid South Africa, where the inherent violence, racism and alienation characterised every sphere of community and social existence. Denis-Constant Martin (2001:253) describes the ambivalent position of the Coloured elite, who wanted to distance themselves from the working class so as to open dialogue with the White ruling class, but at the same time claimed that their mission was the ‘upliftment’ of their community, and they therefore were representative of the whole Coloured community.

In addition to this ambiguous position taken up by the Coloured elite, certain influential Whites who took a special interest in the Coloureds, like I.D. du Plessis, the Afrikaans poet, were at pains to demonstrate that the Coloureds were different from the Blacks, as they shared a common language (Afrikaans) with Whites. Although this allowed a special link to be formed between Coloureds and certain sections of the White population, they were still seen as subordinates and ‘Malay’ culture (from which most of the elite originated) was regarded by Whites as superior to the rest of ‘Coloured culture’.

The Coloured elite

> …placed … themselves in opposition to the dominant White power base, (but) …sought to prove their level of civilisation by demonstrating to what extent they had succeeded in assimilating those very same codes and values that the whites used as markers of differentiation.
>
> Martin (2001:253)

A society marked by delirium, indeed. It is not surprising that the authorities needed an intricate and powerful bureaucratic machine to keep track of the subtle levels of differentiation, classification and movements between groups. The "splitting" of the colonial space of consciousness leads to a very particular dynamic when looking at the way in which identities and subjectivities are constructed. When the history, culture and politics of a society is "marked by delirium" as described by Fanon, the tensions between accepting assigned identities and subject positions and actively constructing a self-determined identity become acute. On the one hand, there are the external forces of state and society that assign interests and identities to specific groups, and on the other, there is the knowledge that identities are asserted by the individual, in a reciprocal relationship with the context. "…ethnic and racial identities are changeable, contingent, and diverse". (Cornell & Hartmann,1998:73) Identities are responsive to situations, relationships, and social processes, which are also subject to change.

Identity construction is not about cultural or social ties alone. There is also a strong emotional attachment to a perceived ethnicity or identity, which is not necessarily based on history or circumstance. Cornell and Hartmann (1998: 89) emphasise that when groups of people construct ethnicities, they usually anchor this identity on the basis of primordial blood ties or common origins: "…even the thinnest ethnicities tend to be rooted in the kinship metaphor." The power of these perceived ties of

common origin, kinship or blood relationship lies in the significance attached to them by people. Thus we have a contradictory situation of "constructed primordiality" (ibid.:90), where the "consciousness" or "idea" of a primordial bond takes precedence over the construction of identity on the basis of common interests, culture or social organisation. In the daily experience of ordinary human beings, the sense of belonging is not necessarily rooted in circumstances or social organisation and Cornell and Hartmann (1998:90) argue that "much of the power of ethnicity and race comes not from anything genuinely primordial but from the rhetoric and symbolism of primordialism that are so often attached to them". Thus, in the films under discussion, we see how the interviewees in the documentary stage a rhetorical performance of ideal community, and the boys in *Waiting for Valdez* perform gangster rituals, although in reality this performance is merely symbolic. This is also related to how gang members describe themselves as "blood brothers" who have attained a primordial kinship through ties of ritual and common interests and activities. The attachment to the anti-hero figure of the gangster is therefore more than nostalgia, he has, in fact, become a kinsman and as such is very difficult to let go.

The view of identity as fluid and reactive to social context is pertinent to the radical change of 'dominant discourse' in South Africa since 1994. In the case of the community of Westbury, the making of films about their community an attempt to reconstruct identities within the representation of the past, but also a revolt against the dominant discourse of the past. It is a rewriting of the narrative of their existence. The challenge is to examine whether the reconstructed identities differ substantially from the ones previously assigned and if their vision of their place in the discourse of post-apartheid South Africa does, in fact, differ.

Hybrid Identities: Coloured identity and Coloured Culture

Hybridity is one of the most contested concepts in postcolonial studies and, as such, offers rich grounds for further investigation. In the context of this study, however, it will be dealt with only in relation to the position of the Coloured community on the 'borders' of South African society; their 'in-between' status in terms of identity, ethnicity and culture. Discourses of racial 'purity' and hybridity are especially pertinent in the South African Coloured context and it would be interesting to examine how constructions of culture, memory and 'nature' combine to either subvert or support dominant perceptions of community. Desiree Lewis advocates drawing attention to hybrid discourses in South Africa as opposed to examining essentialist identities, as this is more likely to uncover entrenched assumptions about the way in which 'race' includes or excludes communities. In her opinion,

> These hybridized versions might more readily allow insight into a complex and unstable terrain, rather than merely confirm conventions whose meanings are established through ritualistic interpretative and representational practices.
>
> Lewis (in Erasmus,2001:156)

In the South African situation, and given the particular situation of the Coloured people, investigation of these hybrid spaces could offer fertile ground for investigating the way in which representational practices function in diverse and fluid community spheres.

According to Lawrence Grossman (1996:90), theories of identity take shape around concepts of difference, fragmentation, hybridity, border and diaspora. *Difference* describes a relationship where the subordinate term (or colonial subject) is defined negatively in relation to the dominant term (or the colonial master). The subordinate needs to be defined for the

dominant master to exist, and the dominant power constructs its other as 'different'. Stuart Hall (1992:21) takes up the issue of fragmentation and points out how identities are often contradictory and always situational. "…we are all involved in a series of political games around fractured or decentered identities. The act of representation becomes not just about decentering the subject but actually exploring the kaleidoscopic conditions of blackness". This can be directly related to the position of the community of Westbury, where the situation of being displaced, being marginalised and virtually invisible under apartheid, determined the identities which were constructed in the face of this reality, the assigned "conditions of blackness".

This is not only reflected in postcolonial relationships, but also in post-apartheid relationships where, more so than under colonialism, the 'presence' of the colonial (or apartheid) subject was 'managed' in the sense that Edward Said describes subjectivity in the Orient. According to Ramirez (2004:1137), power and difference together constitute politics. This interplay is revealed in many different texts, cultural artefacts and social interactions.

The concepts of hybridity, borders and diaspora offer rich analytic possibilities in the light of the evident racial "hybridity" of the Coloured people and their existence as displaced people at the edges of society. Like the subaltern in Lawrence Grossman's description, the Coloured person inhabits a "third space"[15], on a border between two differences: "…The subaltern is neither one nor the other but is defined by its location in a unique spatial condition which constitutes it as different from either alternative" (Grossman,1996:91)

[15] Homi Bhabha's concept of the 'third space' or 'interstitial space' is discussed in more detail below.

Related to this are the concepts of border crossing and hybridity, which are relevant to the drawing of boundaries between groups and the blurring of those boundaries, as well as situations where people are forced to live in the space between boundaries.

Renato Rosaldo (1989: 201) has an interesting view on how social scientists tend to render "culturally invisible" people from groups that are similar to themselves. Thus, groups who are in a subordinate power relationship and therefore 'different' from the observer, are attributed with a distinct culture. Culture and difference are therefore conflated in a particular way and these 'differences' make groups more 'visible' to outsiders, but this is problematic because differences are not absolute. While social analysts are quick to notice cultural difference in subordinate groups, but turn a blind eye to their own cultural attributes. This absence of 'culture' in certain groups is an illusion, however, and an excuse for exclusion of others whose cultural difference can so easily mark them as inferior (as does race, economic class, etc). Often, groups in transition, such as immigrants or communities in times of transition, would be culturally invisible as "they were no longer what they once were and not yet what they could become". (Rosaldo,1989:209) Rosaldo argues towards an alternative notion of culture as productive, with cultural border zones being "not analytically empty transitional zones" but …"sites of creative cultural production" (ibid., 1989:208.)

In *The Black Atlantic,* Paul Gilroy imagines a "… Black Atlantic diasporic space crisscrossed by peoples, ships, ideas, and cultural forms" (cited Ballinger , 2004:38). He proposes an anti-essentialist position, where hybridity and "*metissage*" can serve as counterpoint to the concept of some "mythical African essence". He also takes a clear look at the complex historical development of notions and ideologies of purity and

mixture. Marwan Kraidy (2002:316) investigates the trope of hybridity in cultural theory and criticism and gives a cogent account of the arguments and counter-arguments which have been raised in the debate about this issue. Hybridity and migration go hand in hand with globalisation. The Coloured community can be seen as a hybrid people, redefining themselves in the modern globalised society. Modernity also encourages a constant rethinking and preservation of 'difference'. It is impossible to confine these processes within the framework of a nation state in the traditional sense of the word, especially with the migration and ease of communication that characterise the twenty-first century.

Renato Rosaldo's notion of "borderland anthropology" (1989:202) centres on questions of identity, cultural citizenship and linguistic and cultural hybridity. These "border zones" both literal and metaphorical offer the space for dominated communities to claim cultural identities without resorting to essentialism in terms of race, culture or language. This creative hybridisation along the borders of society re-appropriates dominant cultural codes, re-emphasising and re-shaping traditional forms. "The view is that these subversive performances of identity 'deploy hybridity as a disruptive democratic discourse of cultural citizenship' in the service of 'a distinctly anti-imperial and antiauthoritarian development'" (Ballinger , 2004: 31).

Pamela Ballinger points out that concepts of purity and hybridity function at a number of levels in Yugoslavia, and that these discourses point to hidden histories of 'race' and 'cultural fundamentalism'. She suggests that the "potentially pernicious recombinations of culture and nature found in purity and hybridity discourses in the Julian March" do not "subvert essentialist frameworks", but end up reproducing them instead (Ballinger , 2004:32). These "recombinations of nature and culture" can lead to a

particular type of strategic essentialism: Brah (1992:144) notes how difficult it is to deal with this essentialism when examining the construction of new political identities. He cites Spivak (1987) and Fuss (1989), who both argued in favour of this kind of "strategic essentialism", stating that if the essentialist position is framed from the vantage point of a dominated group, it is worth the 'risk'. However, this remains problematic "if a challenge to one form of oppression leads to the reinforcement of another" (ibid:144). Although it may seem over-ambitious, he advocates challenging all oppressions by understanding how they articulate and inform each other.

Azoulay also cautions against a blanket rejection of race as a marker of difference – as he says: "*Where do we go once we have acknowledged that "the Negro was invented by Whites?"* (Italics in original). (Azoulay , 1989:132). He is sceptical about the possibility of defining oneself as 'raceless' or 'hybrid' in a society where race is still, in practice, a defining feature. At this particular time, it is still premature to dismiss the political efficacy of strategic essentialism. People need to name their differences, define what unites them, even if it means resorting to essentialism. To identify only on the basis of being human, as Fanon (1986/1957) advocates, is to "deny the efficacy of memory". This could lead to a disavowal of important events in the past, which form the basis of a shared heritage, however traumatic they might be (Azoulay , 1996:137).
Homi Bhabha (1996:58) points out how the Bakhtinian hybrid undermines notions of cultural totalisation:

> It is the collision between differing points of view on the world that are embedded in these forms (…) such unconscious hybrids have been at the same time profoundly productive historically: they are pregnant with potential for new world views, with new' internal forms' for perceiving the world in words.
>
> (Bhaktin (1981), cited Bhabha,1996)

Bhabha emphasises how the concept of hybridity can describe "…the construction of cultural authority within conditions of political antagonism or inequity." The hybrid strategy offers a space of negotiation within the interplay of power which is the hallmark of situations of oppression. "Such negotiation is neither assimilation nor collaboration. It makes possible the emergence of an 'interstitial' agency that refuses the binary representation of social antagonism (Bhabha , 1996:59). In this interstitial space, it becomes possible to move away from the "partial culture" that used to define groups and to reconstruct histories and identities, and a new vision of community. The third space is the site of the moment of challenging the dominant cultural power (Nuttall , 2000:7). However, this notion of opposition through the coming together of distinct cultures to form a hybrid which subverts and challenges dominant stereotypes is always tied to the politics of resistance.

Sarah Nuttall (2000:6-7)[16] points out that the notion of creolization would possibly be more appropriate to the cultural processes which have taken place in South Africa. The process of inventing new cultures referred to by creolization is sometimes political, but also often is a "more porous process" with the emphasis on "transformative fusions". (Nuttall , 2000:6) Creolization carries meaning beyond multiculturalism (which still implies boundaries, and not complete convergence of culture) and hybridity which, according to Nuttall, is a contested term. Hybridity either implies the coming together of distinct cultures to form a third, while retaining some elements of these cultures , or hybridity can be seen as "a third space" which " exhausts difference" and "destabilises all identity" in the process of coming together.

[16] Sarah Nuttall has productively reworked the concept of creolization first used by Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy, and this may offer a more useful point of departure when examining the emergent cultural practices and identities in South Africa.

Nuttall points out how several writings about South Africa have focussed on the connections and transformations in intimate spaces, and de-emphasised the concept of frontiers and boundaries which has permeated so many representations of South Africa to the rest of the world. This daily interchange between slave and master in intimate space gave us the legacy of the "…as yet unexamined creole culture of South Africa" (Robert Shell, cited Nuttall, , 2000:8). She describes a view of South African society before colonial intervention "…not so much in terms of barriers, frontiers, margins, and centres but as a set of reciprocal worlds and hybridized encounters between individuals and societies open to exchange and fusion" (Nuttall , 2000:8).

She argues that although readings of culture in postcolonial studies have tended to focus on difference, the affinities between people which are evident in the process of creolization should be the focus of the study of how to build a future in South Africa. "The theoretical possibilities of the term 'creolization' need to be drawn on not to bring about erasure – an erasing of difference – but to underwrite a complex process of making connections" (ibid:8) .

Pamela Ballinger states how Anzaldua's pioneering work on the *mestiza*, formed along the Mexican-U.S. frontier, resonates with the language of miscegenation. In Anzaldua's view, "… this mixture of races, rather than resulting in an inferior being, provides hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with a rich gene pool" (in Ballinger 1987:77). Ballinger cautions that the slipperiness of the definition of the term could give rise to, among other problems, issues of homogenisation, commodification of hybridity in the discourse of globalisation, and the hegemony of the idea

of hybridity in an internationalist, elitist cultural studies framework. Hybridity does continue to challenge essentialist notions of race and ethnicity. Ballinger states, however, that scholars of "borderland hybridity" like Appadurai, Bhabha and Waters

> … suggest that these phenomena, together with distinct but related unsettlings of place such as diasporic flows, reflect something new in an increasingly globalised, deterritorialised world; much of the supposed novelty of global circulation is thus located in specifically cultural processes, notably those of Diaspora and hybridism
>
> Ballinger (2004: 37).

Rosaldo supports this idea that it is impossible to imagine authentic culture as an autonomous and coherent 'universe' in our postcolonial world, and commends Anzaldua for the way in which she has "…further developed and transformed the figure at the crossroads in a manner that celebrates the potential of borders in opening new forms of human understanding" (Rosaldo , 1989:216).

It is natural for people to want to group themselves around ideas or imaginings of what binds them and the notion of hybridity offers a place for concepts that do not fit comfortably into a homogenised concept of community – a hybrid community in terms of race, class, and heritage can define themselves in terms of that which makes them different and defines them as a group. In the case of Westbury, the defining features of the group have been closely allied to the characteristics of gang culture, and the difference has been marked by violence, alcoholism, drug trafficking and the disintegration of family life. For better or worse, these are the memories that this community hold as their unique cultural heritage. Coming to terms with this history now that the main underlying

causes for the disintegration of social structures has been removed or transformed, is a traumatic process. This is a community disabled by the past, yet unable to move past the perversion of community life into a stable and untroubled future.

The history of Westbury from the outside is seen as a recurring cycle of violent gang wars, drug abuse, rape and murder. This represented history forms part of the public memory of a community which can justifiably be marginalised as a result of the construction of this stereotype. Public history and memory can, in turn, be used in many different ways for political purposes. The way in which one remembers the past has an impact on the present, as past ideas can mould present events. This is closely allied to Frantz Fanon's view. He states,

> Colonisation is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it.
>
> Fanon (1976:170).

Ironically, it is also the colonised (and in this case, people affected by apartheid) who 'distort' their past in an attempt to construct communal identities. In his discussion of the interplay of history, culture and ancestry in the construction of ethnicity, Fenton (1999:6) stresses that social classifications based on ethnicity come about "*through relationships".* In the course of daily social interactions, people construct a concept of their identity, origins and history. This forms the basis for the stories or narratives they use to explain the complexities and insecurities of their past and current existence. Cornell and Hartmann support this view when they assert: "Experience constructs identities" (1998:100) Not only are collective identities shaped by experience, but when groups of people see themselves in certain ways, this becomes part of how they view the

world and this perception is then embedded in social and cultural practice –thus identities, which are constructed by circumstances, can set certain actions in motion which reconstruct circumstances (ibid., 95) .

Steve Fenton quotes Anthony Smith, who gives an interesting description of how communities, which he calls 'ethnie', provide a historically enduring sense of peoplehood to members of the group:

> Ethnie have vied or colluded with other forms of community – of city, class, religion, region – in providing a sense of identity among populations and in inspiring in them nostalgia for their past and its traditions. In periods of grave crisis, it has even been able to arouse in them powerful sentiments of anger and revenge for what were seen as attacks on a traditional lifestyle and identity … By invoking a collective name, by the use of symbolic images of community, by the generation of stereotypes of the community and its foes, by the ritual performance and rehearsal of ceremonies and feasts and sacrifices, by the communal recitation of past deeds and ancient heroes' exploits, men and women have been enabled to bury their sense of loneliness and insecurity in the face of natural disasters and human violence by feeling themselves to partake of a collectivist and its historic fate which transcends their individual existences.
>
> Smith 1986 (cited Fenton,1999:7-8)

This description bears an uncanny resemblance to the way in which gang culture has become a key site of community construction, where remembrance of their exploits, rituals and practices can be shaped into a communal narrative. The process described above, which is an attempt to feel like part of a community in a fragmented and changing world, is reflected in the films under discussion. Through the construction of a narrative of their existence, albeit socially objectionable, the people of Westbury can make sense of the past.

Through the reading of the visual texts under discussion, the role remembrance plays in the construction of a post-apartheid identity will become apparent. The history of forced removals, crime and violence, which is recounted in especially the transcripts of interviews, is sometimes nostalgic, sometimes traumatic, but always points to a yearning for 'place', definition, a sense of independent and concrete being in the shifting social conditions that constitute the history of the community. When the community reflects on what binds it and bases action, political or social, on these perceived bonds, people can start to shape their daily lives according to their hopes and dreams for a communal future. In the interviews with community members in *Westbury, Plek van Hoop,* there is a sense of optimism that reflects this sense of moving forward on the basis of past experience.

When examining culture, we should look at what conceptual maps are shared through shared history, memory and common language systems.

In the case of Westbury, the rediscovery of a communal identity or the construction of a new conceptual map takes place through reference to what the community shares or imagines it shares within the shifting social context of post-apartheid South Africa. Frantz Fanon describes this rediscovery of cultural identity as a

> …passionate research … directed by the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-contempt, resignation and abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others.
>
> Fanon (1976:170)

This "passionate research" is a search for meaning in the confusing landscape of the modern world, and the connections constructed through ethnicity can provide an avenue to a stronger sense of community in

future. In our globalised world, in a society in transformation, communal identity has become more important than ever:

> The blessings of modernity are many, but the preservation of intimate, meaningful communities has not been one of these... Ethnicity, with its sense of historical continuity and its claims to deep and meaningful – even primordial – interpersonal ties, holds out the prospect of communion and connection, of a mediating community between the individual and the large, impersonal institutions that dominate the modern world. If ethnicity does not deliver community in practice, it can do so at least in the imagination.
>
> (Cornell & Hartmann , 1998: 98)

Through this imagining of a common future and some form of historical continuity, communities can "lay claim to meanings of their own". They continue: "…this act of the imagination is a classically ethnic act" (ibid., 99) So the supreme irony has come to pass, that the ethnicity, fragmented racial identity and marginalisation which characterised the community of Westbury under apartheid can be the very instrument of creating a communal future when the power to determine that future is in their own hands.

Chapter 4: Memory, History and Narrative in *Waiting for Valdez (2002)* and *Westbury, Plek van Hoop (2003)*

The analysis in this chapter seeks to examine the representation of identity, community, culture and historic memory in both the documentary *Westbury, Plek van Hoop (2003)* and *Waiting for Valdez* (2002). The two films which form the basis for this study have been chosen for a few reasons. Firstly, both films deal with Westbury, or 'Western' as it is known to residents. *Westbury, Plek van Hoop* is a documentary, produced and filmed by the people of Westbury themselves, with some assistance from more experienced filmmakers in the actual shooting and editing. *Waiting for Valdez* is a short fiction which represents one of the first instances of scriptwriting for film about the community by a representative of the community. Both films offer a vision of the community of Westbury – one a vision of the present looking forward into an imagined future, the other a nostalgic remembering of the past. Much of the social and community information which is included in the accounts of the interviewees in *Westbury, Plek van Hoop* is mentioned only in passing in *Waiting for Valdez,* which recounts the story of a boy growing up in the township through the very particular lens of his own remembered experience.

A few other, superficial differences should be noted: the documentary *Westbury, Plek van Hoop* is shot in colour, in a conventional documentary style with interviews interspersed with cutaways. *Waiting for Valdez* is shot in black and white, offering ample opportunity to evoke resonances of old films and the nostalgic experience of watching black and white film which most viewers would identify with (be they Black, or White!) In evoking the look of old newsreel footage, the film

also connects us to what is generally accepted as historical truth, thus positioning the film between the realm of pure fantasy and actuality. Therefore, the film is only marginally fictional, as *Westbury, Plek van Hoop* can, upon close examination, be seen to be based largely on an imagined reality, and therefore only marginally factual.

The history of Westbury is scarred with tales of violence and marginalisation. Don Mattera describes the township as follows in his poem about Westbury (WECODEC,2003:31):

> "…the houses stand like men and women that are condemned to death. And there is not sunshine. Sunshine does not come. It only comes when the bodies must leave, in boxes. Leave this place. Sometimes Lazarus was better off because Jesus came for Lazarus. Who comes for the Lazarus called Westbury. Western. Its name does not appear on the Johannesburg map. Like its people, it is a twilight zone there. Twilight people living in a twilight area, because the apartheid government has consigned them to this twilight existence. They are neither black, nor white, and painful."

It is from this history of exclusion, oppression, violence and bloodshed that the residents of Westbury are trying to reconstruct a new identity, a new sense of equality and community which connects them to broader South African society.

Representations of Identity

It has become clear from the previous chapters that identity and the search for identity in post-apartheid South Africa is a process which is embedded in the unequal power relationships of the past, which traces the "fault lines" which are still very much present in today's social structures. [17]. Lawrence Grossman (1996:90) has noted that investigating the politics of identity "involves questioning how identities are produced and taken up through practices of representation." In a close reading of the films it becomes possible to examine how the practices of representation have been utilised in the case of the community of Westbury to give a particular voice to a particular group of people at a particular time.

In recent academic debate, the concept of identity has become almost synonymous with the theory and politics of identity and difference. (Grossman, 1996:87). In an attempt to define identity, it is no longer adequate to imagine a fixed position from which difference can be defined in relation to other groups and individuals. It is now accepted that identities are constantly being constructed and deconstructed (Hall, 1996:4, Zegeye 2001:3), that the process of taking up certain subject positions in relation to others is fluid and ongoing.

[17] Herman Wasserman (2003:16) has cautioned that unconditional acceptance and celebration of a hybrid culture in South Africa could disregard the inherent "fault lines" in South African society (both economic and political) which prevent free cultural exchange across boundaries. Social, economic and political power relationships have not yet transformed sufficiently to allow for a completely free interchange across racial, social and economic divisions.

Although much has been written on identity formation in White and Black communities in South Africa[18], the notion of Coloured identity is still contested and ambiguous. The conceptualisation of Coloured identity in South Africa is interesting because it resists discourses of essentialism and politically expedient classifications, urging us instead to examine notions of shared culture, shared histories of displacement and oppression, as well as communal memory.

When Homi Bhabha asks: "How it is possible to for humans to live their difference?" (Fanon, 1986:xvii), he is reaching for meaning in a shifting world: is it possible to establish an identity in relation to 'others'; to live your own 'otherness'? In the case of Westbury, the community defines itself in terms of its history, which consists of dislocation, social problems and fragmentation of community life. Their perception of themselves and especially their past is based on the negative perception of past transgressions and the prospect of an uncertain future.

Ebrahim Rasool (1996:56) states "Coloured consciousness and identity, rather than being self-aware, empowering and confident, is constructed fearfully, out of threat and opposition, and defined in negative relation to the other, not through a positive perception of the self."

In South Africa, unequal power relations connected each part of the social structure in an intricate web of knowledge and meaning, which regulated the minutiae of everyday existence for all South Africans. Foucault speaks of power as "a productive network which runs through

[18] See the "Social Identities South Africa" series, and in particular the volumes edited by Abebe Zegeye (2001) and Zimitri Erasmus (2003). In addition, Wasserman & Jacobs (2003) write specifically about the shifting notion of identity in post-apartheid South Africa.

the whole social body" (Foucault, cited in Hall, 1997:50). Pockets of resistance against the regime could very easily become engulfed in the overwhelming tide of dominant regulated practice, and the histories of suppressed communities were written in terms of the meanings this discourse produced. In the circuit of power under colonial conditions (and under apartheid), identity is closely connected to difference, representation and culture (Hall, 1997). This struggle continues after 1994. The discourses of the past are appropriated in the process of reconstructing identities in the present. 'Blackness' or 'Colouredness' is only known as a binary of 'Whiteness', which precludes the creation of new identities, and could result in the continual re-identification and reworking of previously assigned labels. This confusion is summarised in the words of a poet and community leader in Westbury:

> *Maar vir my het Western, wat nou Westbury is, altyd 'n diep pyn gewys. Want hier is weggegooi, Gods beste kinders, en (vir) hulle word gesê hulle is Hotnots en Boesmans. En hulle sê vandag vir jou: 'eers in apartheid was ons nie wit genoeg nie, mnr Mattera, nou in die nuwe bedeling is ons nie swart genoeg nie.'* (But for me Western, which is now Westbury, has always caused deep pain. Because God's best children have been discarded here and told they are Hottentots and Bushmen. And today they say to me: 'first under apartheid we weren't white enough, and now, Mr Mattera, now in the new system we aren't black enough.')
>
> Don Mattera (WECODEC,2003:2)

This comment highlights the ambiguous position of Coloured communities in South Africa, and the fact that this confusion has not been cleared up magically after 1994. This follows on the discussion above of the "residual" nature of Coloured identity (as articulated by Erasmus, 2001). It is evident that the 'Black-White' binary is still alive and well, and being used as a basis for defining positions in society.

Homi Bhabha comes close to describing the process at work when previously disregarded cultural groups strive to represent marginal identities when he states that : "Hybrid agencies find their voice in a dialectic that does not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty. They deploy the partial culture from which they emerge to construct visions of community, and versions of historic memory, that give narrative form to the minority positions they occupy; the outside of the inside: the part in the whole. (Bhabha,1996:59) This is especially true in the case of *Westbury, Plek van Hoop ,* which has emerged from a 'partial culture', a culture remembered and reconstructed as part of a very specific discursive formation resulting from apartheid, and where the narrative of the subject positions occupied in the present is presented in the mould of the stereotypical narratives of the past.

The difficulty in imagining a communal identity is compounded by the position of the Coloured community in apartheid South Africa, where 'race' was routinely utilised as a marker of difference. The legacy of the past still lingers, however, and race and class remain to a large extent "the master narratives of most South African texts in the post-apartheid context", despite attempts to shake off this legacy (Wasserman, 2003:17). Zimitri Erasmus also proposes that instead of defining Coloured identity purely in terms of race, we look to culture for a way forward: "Rather, we need to see them as cultural identities comprising detailed bodies of knowledge, specific cultural practices, memories, rituals and modes of being" (Erasmus, 2001:21).

The notion of identity as a process of production which is never complete and always implicated by the subject's position within a specific political, economic and social system, is especially appropriate for the analysis of productions emerging from the Coloured community

of Westbury. Stuart Hall (1989:68) discusses the emergent 'new subject' of cinema in recent times and reminds us that "the practices of representation always implicate the positions from which we speak or write – the positions of enunciation." He suggests that when looking at cinematic representation of identity, we approach it as follows:

> Perhaps, instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished historical fact, which the new cinematic discourses then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.
>
> Hall (1989:68)

He does caution that this view "problematizes the very authority and authenticity to which the term, 'cultural identity', lays claim". In the light of the ambiguity and tenuous 'authority' which we have noted in terms of notions of 'Coloured culture', 'Coloured identity' and even the definition of a 'Coloured person', we can rest assured that this authority and authenticity is open to question in any case.However, an examination of the representation of emerging identities in the two films under discussion makes it possible to trace how the dominant political, economic and social structures of the past are still bleeding through into the present in the enunciation of certain subject positions.

The ambiguous position of Coloureds under apartheid, the marginalised existence that these communities were forced to lead, has rendered the process of constructing a sense of identity (no matter how fragile) fraught with emotion and uncertainty. Saun Field (2001:104) points out that this construction of a place in the world is no simple thing: "…the emotional consequences of living hybrid identities can be confusing, complicated and painful." This pain is not always acknowledged, even by the communities themselves. When recounting their remembrances

of past oppression, communities take the safe option of couching their tales in the dominant storytelling paradigms of their previous oppressors, utilising elements of the discourse that previously marginalised them from the grand narrative.

It is not surprising that people group themselves around ideas or imaginings of what binds them and what makes them different, looking to their past to do so. We are reminded of Anthony Smith's description of how 'ethnie' use remembrance to face the insecurity of an uncertain presence (Smith1986, cited Fenton 1999: 7-8). This is an appropriate observation, but also somewhat simplistic. Because this reconstruction of memory is an attempt to become part of broader society, to re-enter the collective of South Africa as equal members of a new society, there is a certain amount of selection and interpretation in the retelling of painful memories. The exploits of the heroes of the past, the gangsters and thugs who seem to have come to represent the whole of Westbury in the eyes of the outside world, are and retold without rancour and with a certain melancholy wistfulness. If the gangsters themselves are now open to censure and denunciation, the qualities they represented (masculinity, strength, uncompromising retaliation in the face of adversity) are not condemned, but celebrated. This is especially apparent in *Waiting for Valdez,* but permeates the subtext of the tales told about gangsters in *Westbury, Plek van Hoop*.

When looking at cultural identities, it is useful to explore the notion of hybridity, one of the most contested concepts in postcolonial studies. Renato Rosaldo's notion of "borderland anthropology" (1989:202) offers the space for fragmented communities to reclaim cultural identities in a process of "creative hybridisation". When communities operate in Bhabha's 'interstitial space', which offers the possibility of negotiation of

cultural authority within conditions of political oppression.(1996:59) The third space is the site of the moment of challenging the dominant cultural power (Nuttall, 2000:7). In this interstitial space, it becomes possible to move away from the 'partial culture' that defined the past and move towards a reconstruction of histories and identities. However, this notion of opposition through the coming together of distinct cultures to form a hybrid which subverts and challenges dominant stereotypes is always tied to the politics of resistance.

Sarah Nuttall, like Hall and Gilroy before her, suggests the use of the term 'creolization' when discussing hybrid cultural processes at work. Creolization carries meaning beyond multiculturalism (which still implies boundaries, and not complete convergence of culture) and hybridity which, (according to Nuttall) is a contested term (Nuttall, 2000:6-7). The term signifies cultural borrowing and cultural creation under conditions of marginality, the "construction of an identity out of elements of ruling as well as subaltern cultures" (Erasmus, 2001:16). However, as Erasmus correctly points out, the fact of borrowing from dominant cultures does not invalidate the identity that is constructed, and neither should Coloured identity be seen as purely an apartheid label – it is being shaped and reconstructed continuously by Coloured people themselves (ibid:16).

In our increasingly globalised society, where cultures overlap, change and hybridise, there is a view that hybridisation, or creolization, would offer the opportunity for new forms of creative cultural practices. Living on the boundaries, or margins of society, in the interstitial space described by Bhabha (1996) could give rise to the emergence of more complex and interesting notions of community identity. Many believe that this hybrid subject position, ambiguous and shifting as it seems,

offers the opportunity for rich cultural production which would reflect these hybrid identities. These cultural artefacts are directed at subverting dominant representations of the past and could be regarded as an act of resistance against the assigned communal identities and narratives of the past.

In the case of the community of Westbury, the making of films about their community could therefore be regarded as an attempt to reconstruct communal identities and challenge dominant discourses of the past. These discourses include the rewriting or retelling of the partial histories of the apartheid era, giving a face to those whose faces were blanked out in the process of writing official histories, which denied the oppressed colonial subjects individuality, culture or subjectivity (Gqola, 2001:46). In theory, this is an opportunity to subvert assigned identities and official history and rewrite the narrative of their existence.

When one interrogates notions of hybridity and creolization with regards to this “borderland” cultural production, the image that arises is of a free flow of creative energy between previously isolated groups, of cultural borrowings and the interchange of ideas in the construction of new social and cultural identities. The interaction that takes place in this hybrid state is seen as fluid, a free flowing river between two sites of differentiation, a gentle stream of cultural interaction and intermingling. This border zone is, however, also one of abrasion, of rubbing up against assigned identities and entrenched stereotypes. In the friction that is created when the aspiration to reconstruct identities encounters the stereotypical discourses of the past, entrenched patterns are more likely to be deepened before the flow can be redirected into more productive channels.

Therefore any discussion of hybridity, creolization and cultural production in terms of a re-assertion of cultural identity must take cognisance of the social and political conditions under which Coloured culture and identity are being shaped and were shaped in the past. Transformation of political structures have not necessarily led to greater certainties in terms of the place of Coloured people in the social and economic structures of post-apartheid South Africa. Social inequalities, poverty and uncertain living conditions continue to influence community life.

Don Mattera (WECODEC, 2003:2) comments:

> *Want, ons is vry, maar daar is baie diep en slegte dinge wat nog aangaan met onse mense. Die bevryding het nie die armoede beëindig nie. Dit het nie die dakloosheid beëindig nie. Daar is werkloosheid en sulke dinge. So die politiek kan nie alles doen nie.* (Because, we are free, but there are many deep and bad things which still happen to our people. Liberation did not end poverty. It did not end homelessness. There is unemployment and such things. So politics cannot do everything.)

Ideologically, the construction of a historical narrative of community life is problematic. In the absence of written official histories, constructing a communal identity becomes an exercise in remembering, a harking back to the previous place, the former dwelling, the lost community. Richard Werbner speaks of "politicised memory" where we need to take cognisance of the social and political events of the past and how they have shaped the future:

> … by recognising the interpersonal power that both remembering and forgetting have to effect identity formation, … we seek to understand the ethical work of memory in the postcolonial construction of state, institutional and civic authority.
>
> Werbner (1998:15)

Thus, how groups imagine their community identity is intimately linked to a narrative constructed from fragments of memory (and forgetting!) of shared oppression, the traumatic dislocations of life under apartheid and tales of heroic resistance. However, this leads to the unconscious reconstruction of identities in terms of past stereotypes. Recollection of the past takes place within a specific paradigm of shared history and oppression, with certain key features elided and others, which support the overarching narrative, being given undue emphasis. This is evident in the evocative recollection and retelling of stories of the sites of forced removals, like Sophiatown and District Six. Phaswane Mpe (2003:185) notes how

> "Sophiatown and Soweto (…) have been microcosms of the struggle in which the apartheid state apparatus and its opponents played out their political drama. The two are also often presented as sites of pain, alienation and frustration, while simultaneously serving as anchors of hope in the possibilities of the future."
>
> Mpe (2003:185)

In post-apartheid South Africa, perceptions of many communities are scarred by entrenched stereotypes, like the view of Coloured communities as groups of violent thugs and gangsters.

In the absence of cultural and social histories, Coloured communities are akin to Glissant's notion of "cornered communities" (cited in Erasmus, 2003:22-3), where social history has been eradicated. In the absence of concrete references to history, Coloured identities are constructed from fragments of cultural material "…available in the contexts of slavery, colonialism and cultural dispossession. This leaves their constructed and composite historical nature always evident and their dislocation always present." In addition, the social structure of the

present is in crisis – the economic and social conditions which defined the social order under apartheid have not magically disappeared, and the knowledge paradigm which is available to reconstruct visions of community is the one which was meticulously erected by the dominant regime of the past. There is no frame of reference that can be utilised to construct new visions of the future.

There is also a problem of "memory and remembering involved in discourses about, and of, the subaltern" (Pillay , 2003:286) David Pinnock (cited in Pillay , 2003) points out that with forced removals, whole cultures began to disintegrate – not only the physical structures of schools, streets, houses and shebeens, but also social spaces like networks of friendships, neighbourhood and work. These networks provide a sense of solidarity, local loyalties and traditions. Pillay argues that cultures are constantly changing, being 'ripped up' and reconstituting, and criticises the eulogising of histories of places like District Six and Sophiatown. He sees the construction of histories of this kind as a

> … conscious political act, which works from an originary and imaginary "fixed" past, in opposition to a binary "fixed" present…The fixed past is constructed through memory, fantasy, nostalgia, and from the vantage point of the present, related to relationships of power.
>
> Pillay (2003:286).

The existing neighbourhood networks – church groups, soccer matches, and social events – are excluded by the dominant discourse, and these activities only reported on when they happen within the previously Whites-only suburbs, with the community networks existing on the Cape

Flats [19] being typified as those that traffic drugs, alcohol and prostitutes. Activities such as normal school and family days, youth groups and socialising are marginalised out of existence: "The suburbs and its concerns are universalized, while the Cape Flats and its concerns are particularized, pathologised and eulogized". (Pillay , 2003:286)

Richard Werbner (1998:15) writes about memory as public practice, with a focus on politicised memory, or remembering as an act of nation-building. He points out that remembering, as well as forgetting, have power over identity formation and discusses the role of memory in the construction of the postcolonial state.

When living in the complex social and political circumstances of a society like post-apartheid South Africa, memory becomes an unreliable basis upon which to construct meaning. Memories of past subject positions occupy contesting spaces, where the exact nature and significance of these subjectivities are diluted by their position in relation to the dominant paradigms of the past. It becomes impossible, or at best very traumatic, for people to recognise themselves and remember others outside of the stereotype. Meaning is endlessly deferred, the exact nature of the self assigned and hoped-for 'difference' never captured. Thus, the residents of Westbury remember the stereotype of their community in terms of the crime and violence, but forget the uncomfortable fact that the previous state machinery was responsible for many of the social ills. This forgetting is part of the project of re-entry into post-apartheid society, which cannot be jeopardised by negative commentary about government structures.

[19] Although Pillay's study is based on the Cape Flats, the similar experiences of Coloured communities under apartheid render his observations applicable to Coloured communities in general.

The spaces between contesting subjectivities are not porous, allowing a free flow of meaning between them – the jostle up against each other, and bleed into each other. To change a stereotype and reconstruct identities, the stereotype needs to be recognised and challenged. In the ambiguous space of identity construction in Coloured communities, the tenuously reconstructed identities resonate with echoes of the dominant narratives of the past. If the community of Westbury need to demonstrate that they have shaken off the past in order to become part of a greater South African collective, they will revisit old stereotypes and reconstruct new marginalities if necessary.

Film Contexts

Westbury, Plek van Hoop (2003)

After the peace and reconciliation rally in 2001 and the dissolution of the main gangster groupings (the Fast Guns and the Spaldings) WECODEC was commissioned by Kyknet, a channel in the digital bouquet broadcasting in Afrikaans, to make a film about Westbury. The filmmakers were guided in the production process by an experienced producer (Hulette Pretorius) who was involved in the setting up of the television training at WECODEC. Although she wrote the voice over, the conceptualisation and production credits in the end credit list are attributed to Joseph Cotty, the director of WECODEC. The principal photography was done by trainees from WECODEC, and the postproduction was completed by a freelance editor under the guidance of Joseph Cotty and Hulette Pretorius.

The original tapes of the interviews which formed part of this film were also transcribed and grouped into themes. These interviews are at present being compiled into a book about Westbury, and were made

available for this study. Much of what we learn about how the people view their own community, history and search for common identity is evident not only from what was included in the film, but from the parts of the original interviews which did not make it into the film.

Very often, subjects will converse more easily on various topics when being interviewed at length, and these observations do not always make it into the final cut of the film. This should not be seen only as a conscious attempt to manipulate information (although it often is) but often is merely due to time constraints. In what follows, an attempt has been made to determine what information was consciously excluded so that the central message was at all times the focus, and what sections were merely too long for inclusion.

Westbury, Plek van Hoop is couched in traditional documentary film language, and does not deviate from the format which is routinely used by many emerging filmmakers when making a documentary – interviews, with cutaways. What makes the film interesting is not the filmic technique or innovation on a technical level, but the people who participate in relating the story of Westbury. These are the real people who are relating their lived experience, and they are doing so for the first time on their own terms. The choices about what should be included, or excluded, were made by the people themselves. This is not a film which was produced by a broadcaster or outside production company, coming into the community to do research and making a film which is coloured by their own experience and stereotyped view of the community from outside. For all its flaws as a film, this documentary is embedded in the lived experience of the people who made it, and as such reflects much about the people of Westbury.

Waiting for Valdez (2002)

This film was produced as part of MNET's 'New Directions' series in 2002. It was directed by Dumisani Phakati and scripted by Teddy Mattera, the son of poet Don Mattera who is featured in *Westbury, Plek van Hoop* as one of the leaders of the community. Growing up in the Western townships of Johannesburg, Teddy Mattera has intimate knowledge of the issues which communities faced under apartheid.

The film deals with a young boy named Sharkey, who lives with his grandmother following the removal of his parents to other parts of Johannesburg under apartheid. Unable to buy a ticket to go to the cinema to see his hero in the film *Valdez is coming*, Sharkey instead buys the privilege of listening to instalments told by his friends Tox and Feya, who slip into the cinema and then tell the story to the other boys. We are introduced to the different characters that populate Sharkey's world – Ous' Nana who would love to pass for White (or at least Coloured) and who supplies Ouma's 'medicine', the playground bully Monty and his best friend Pangwaan. Despite the difficult circumstances under which the people are living, Sharkey has it relatively easy – as his best friend says, he is lucky to have a granny who loves him, who knits him jerseys to wear to school, cautions him to 'Pray and pee' before going to bed and watches over him with great benevolence and love. We meet his mother (who dreams of being a star) when he visits them in a distant home where he may not live. She is a shadowy figure, however, and his primary relationship is obviously with his grandmother. When she is taken ill and passes away while he is out listening to the next instalment of the retelling of *Valdez is coming*, we feel real compassion for Sharkey. The film ends with a lyrical sequence of Sharkey dancing on the veranda with his grandmother- a celebration of all she has given him, and of their relationship.

Westbury, Plek van Hoop: **Constructing community, (re-) constructing identity**

The history of Westbury from the outside is seen as a recurring cycle of violence and extreme social tensions. When the community remembers the past, they are not only remembering their personal experiences, but memory is coloured by their perception of their place in society, and an attempt to use the representation of the past to improve their future position in the 'new' South Africa.

In *Westbury, Plek van Hoop*, memory permeates every observation or representation of community life, either from the present or the past. The present is defined in terms of how the community has moved on from the past – and the past is seen through the lens of 'where we are now'. In a warped re-enactment of the nostalgic recounting of stories from the past which would feature in films about many other 'normal' communities, this community recounts the exploits of gangsters, thugs and murderers as a melancholic elegy to times gone by. Although the general belief is that 'it is all better now', there is also a sense of wistfulness in the way that they speak of the future, and how it will all change at some unspecified time which no-one can predict with certainty. Even the title of the film signifies the intentions of the producers : to present their neighbourhood as a community looking towards the future with optimism and hope.

The structure of the documentary is also interesting. Although it aims to subvert dominant stereotypes, it is modelled on the very documentaries which perpetuated the stereotypes of the community in the past. The

expository [20]style and conventional structure do not evidence a move away from the discourse of apartheid documentaries. Rather, the style is being appropriated and reconstituted, possibly pointing towards the fact that the community of Westbury want to be part of the discourse from which they were excluded under apartheid. In all likelihood, this choice of style was based on the pragmatic notion that if the film was ever to be broadcast, it had to conform to what a documentary was supposed to look like.

The documentary has the shape of many of the documentaries produced under apartheid by the government, in an attempt to justify their policies. It starts with a strong central message which casts the community in a certain light, and then highlights sections of interviews which support the basic premise. The discourse that is set up usually focuses on one central message of hope, and the pain and suffering that surrounds the central theme is elided or merely mentioned in passing. This is the stuff that propaganda is made of, and while one supports the use propaganda in service of challenging negative stereotypes and rewriting the past, it is interesting that this particular route was followed in conceptualising the production.

The shape of the film is somewhat predictable: members of the community are interviewed, and these interviews are interspersed with footage of community life, overlayed with a female voice over. The narration is upbeat, redolent with phrases which point out how these are

[20] This is a term used by Bill Nichols (1991) to describe a documentary, which is set out as an exposition of a series of facts about a specific subject, usually accompanied by “Voice of God” narration. Michael Rabiger (2004:55) describes it as “too didactic” and points out that it ‘directly addresses issues in the historical world (that is, the wortd we all see and experience as ‘real’” The flaws of this documentary style for representing a true feeling of lived experience are self-evident.

normal people going about their business in the same way as any other community. The opening phrase characterises Westbury as

> *...'n lewendige en tog soms wrede en wanhopige plek, maar ook 'n plek waar mense nou saambou aan 'n toekoms gevul met hoop, lewe en geleenthede.* (..a lively and nevertheless sometimes cruel place without hope, but also a place where people are now building together towards a future filled with hope, life and opportunities)
>
> *(Westbury, Plek van Hoop, 2003).*

It is clear that the film wants to situate the community as energetic and hardworking. The voice over then invites the viewer to listen to the stories of Westbury – "*hartseer, maar ook met deernis* (sad, but also with compassion) ". The message is re-emphasised in the next section of narration, where the community's vision for a better future is pointed out. This is a clear attempt at subverting preconceived notions about the community right from the start, by characterising Westbury as a suburb that is trying to shake off the past. These opening statements serve as a point of reference for everything that is revealed in the rest of the film.

The film is loosely structured in three sections: the first is an overview of the history of Westbury, focusing mainly on the housing problem and the consequences of the forced removal from Sophiatown. The efforts of individuals in the community and community groups to improve conditions is also covered.

The second section deals with the results of social problems like gangsterism in the community. The final section highlights some local young people who have risen above their circumstances and been successful. The conclusion gives an overview of the activities of

community groups and particularly WECODEC, which leads into the final message, reiterating that Westbury is "'*n Plek van hoop, lewe en geleenthede (*A place of hope, life and opportunities)".

Apart from the young people on the move, the interviewees are mainly older members of the community – community leaders like Don Mattera and Mrs. Daniels (who initiated many of the social upliftment projects in Westbury); ex-gangsters and their families like Peter Faver, Winnie Africa, Janga and Bra Keith; and participants in the projects of WECODEC like Joseph Cotty, Antie Jane and Ronald. Several of the religious leaders in the community are given prominent places in the narrative and in this way the discourse of atonement and repentance, which is so prominent in the film, is foregrounded. In addition, young people who have managed to rise above their circumstances and study at university, or are making a successful career for themselves, are foregrounded.

The first interview of the film is with Don Mattera, well known author and a community leader in Westbury. He recounts the story of how his family moved from Sophiatown, and the damage done to the houses by previous residents (presumably White) before they were to move into them – "*omdat die Boesmans hier kom bly* (because the Bushmen were coming to stay here)" (Don Mattera, Personal Interview, WECODEC,2003) .

He refers to the way that Coloured people from various areas were 'thrown' into Western, and how little the authorities cared about the conditions in which people were forced to live. The interviewees all point out that they were under the impression that the move to Westbury was temporary – but they are still there fifty years later. The

tenuousness and marginality of such an existence is self-evident, along with the attendant uncertainty in determining a sense of continuity or affiliation to community and place.

In this section about the housing and social problems, the focus is largely on how people worked together to rise above circumstances. Joseph Cotty says :

> *Dit was nie alles oor swaarkry en gangsterskap nie, dit was oor mense wat saamgelewe het as families – ek het swaargekry maar ek het liefde gehad*. (It wasn't all about struggling and gangsterism, it was about people living together as families – I had a hard life but I had love.)
>
> *(Westbury, Plek van Hoop, 2003)*

The message which comes across strongly in this section is that people are adaptable, and that, as in any neighbourhood, one confronts challenges and life goes on.

The section on the activities of gangsters is introduced as "*Westbury se donker kant het eens op 'n tyd al die mooi dinge verswelg* (At one time, Westbury's dark side engulfed all the beautiful things)". Don Mattera recounts how the gangs got their names, and that terrible violence took place – to the extent that people were scared of going into the area, calling it 'Bangladesh'. Others take up the narrative, recounting exploits of the likes of Fellas Timmerman, who hid from the police in the family refrigerator. These stories are told without rancour, and with seemingly little condemnation of the violence and bloodshed caused by the gangsters. Janga, an ex-gangster, characterises it as: *"Die lewe was 'n bietjie woes gewees daardie tyd…*(Life was a bit fierce in those days...) " And Antie Pula says : " *Dit was vir ons soos 'n film…* (For us, it was like a film…)" Pastor Burgers is at pains to mention that the gangsters

also helped the community in many ways. The adjective used to describe the gangsters is '*woelig*' – or 'restless'. Hardly the terminology one would expect in the light of the tales of regular funerals, gang confrontations, drug and alcohol abuse and social disintegration.

The figure of Peter Faver, an ex gang leader and now a director of WECODEC, is a core element of this discourse. He is presented as a reformed man, someone who became a gangster, not because of the social circumstances that surrounded him, but because he lost both his primary caregivers at a young age and lived close to the gang headquarters. He is referred to by Antie Pula as: " *'n Kind soos enige kind - baie woelerig. As hy aankom dan sê ons: Daar kom hy!* (A child like any other child – very restless. When we see him approach we would say – Here he comes!)" Peter himself attributes his actions to the appeal of gangsters, the fact that they had money and fancy clothes, and does not mention the violence and bloodshed. He does speak of the hurt that the gangsters to the community, and thereby underscores one of the strong messages of the film, which is essentially a call for community responsibility and accountability.

It is interesting to note that, in the sections of interviews that were not used in the film, the true extent of the effect of the gangsters is made apparent. Peter Faver points out what damage was done to community life by gangsters; Winnie Africa notes how all conversations centred around what the gangs had been doing, and Pastor Burgers talks of the deaths due to gangsters and how rival gangs buried their dead almost every weekend. These interviews, which seem to give a greater sense of gritty reality to our vision of Westbury, were never used in the film.

In *Westbury, Plek van Hoop* , the actual causes of the suffering of the community, namely the social ills of apartheid, are not examined in any great detail. There is little sense of anger at the wrongs that were suffered under apartheid – instead, there is almost a sense of shame and atonement[21]. The theme of repentance looms large, with several ex-gangsters recounting how they were led to God and how they are now trying to live better lives. Winnie Africa says in her interview : "*En nou, op die ouderdom van vyftig jaar, kan ek sien wat 'n vrot lewe ek gelei het.* (And now, at the age of fifty years, I can see what a rotten life I've led.)" (Winnie Africa, Personal Interview, WECODEC,2003.) .

Janga, one of the ex-gangsters interviewed, echoes others when he points out that there really was little choice about taking up a life of gangsterism :

> *In ou Western in: die lewe was bietjie woes daardie tyd gewees, vernaam met die ding van die gangsters. Jy weet, as jy nou bo bly, en jy bly onder, jy weet, jy was ge-force om 'n gangster te word. (As) jy nou 'n suster het, jy weet: Jy bly bo, as jou suster afgaan dan word sy gepla daar onder… Hoe gaan jy jou suster verdedig? Dit is op so 'n manier, jy moet maar 'n gangster word.* (In the old Western, life was a bit hectic, especially with this thing of the gangsters. You know, if you live at the top of the road, and you live at the bottom, you know, you were forced to join a gang. And if you have a sister, you live at the top and your sister goes down to the bottom and she is harassed there …How are you going to defend your sister? In this way, you have to become a gangster).
>
> Janga (Personal Interview, WECODEC,2003)

[21] Zimitri Erasmus (2003:13) discusses the combination of "respectability and shame" in middle class Coloured consciousness and how this permeates the community's self-perception.

The role of the government in perpetrating the ills of which they speak is glossed over. Peter Faver says he became a gangster because his mother and grandmother died, not because he grew up on the streets of a township where there were few other options for a young man. He sketches his entry into gangsterism as almost accidental, and speaks of his admiration for the gangster lifestyle :

> *Ek was agt jaar oud. Ons het in Marthastraat gebly enne dit was soos die hoof uithangplek van die Fast Gun bende. En die dinge wat ek gedoen het: ek was altyd daar om hulle tekkies te skrop hulle track suits te skrop, die klein dingetjies te doen, winkel toe te gaan. Hulle klere na die droogskoonmaker toe te vat, en so aan. En, wat ookal oor is van die kos het ek gekry, enne vir my het dit soos 'n wonderlike lewe gelyk, want daar was altyd geld. Die leiers het altyd geld gehet, hulle het die mooiste klere gedra, daar was altyd aanhangers om hulle. Daar was mooi dames om hulle en dit het vir my soos 'n goeie lewe gelyk.* (I was eight years old. We stayed in Martha Street and that was the main hangout of the Fast Guns. And the things I did: I was always there to scrub their tennis shoes and track suits, do the little things, go to the shops. Take their clothes to the dry cleaners, and so on. And whatever was left of the food I got, and it looked like a wonderful life to me, because there was always money. The leaders always had money, they wore the most beautiful clothes, and there were always admirers. There were pretty ladies around them and to me it looked like a good life.)
>
> Peter Faver (Personal Interview, WECODEC, 2003:10)

It is evident from this description that, when young people have no clear concept of community, no imagining of the kind of role models society at large would find generally acceptable, the allure of gangsters and their lifestyle is inescapable.

The fact that these gangsters not only acted like people from movies, but also actively sought this image by choosing their names from movies [22] and generally emulating what they imagined to be the 'Hollywood' lifestyle, made them that much more appealing to young people. The nightlife of Sophiatown, that almost mythological place of never-ending revelry, also figured in the recent memory of the community, and it is this irresistible merging of the unattainable world of cinema with the community's recent history which was ripped away from them, which is especially potent. In what follows, in the discussion of *Waiting for Valdez,* it will become clearer how the world of cinema, and cinema heroes, became a substitute for the role models which were lacking in the real world. As the Reverend Begbie points out (Personal Interview, WECODEC, 2003), the gang world also provided a sense of community which was lacking elsewhere:

> … a gang war has no logic. It is basically a senseless war. That is what it is. For some of them, if they are just part of a gang. Of course there are various reasons why folks join a gang. The gang gives them a sense of belonging. They enjoy some fellowship and they enjoy some caring in that gang that they belong to.
>
> Reverend Begbie (Personal Interview, WECODEC, 2003)

Instead of subverting the stereotypes of the community as violent and unstable, filled with dangerous people, the interviewees in *Westbury, Plek van Hoop* hold up an image of a community trying to atone for their sins. The heroes have not changed; they have merely reformed and are therefore now held to be respectable. The possibility that there could be some gangsters or drug dealers still operational in the community is mentioned in passing. However, the reason for the

[22] In the interviews by WECODEC, Don Mattera gives a brief account of where the gangs got their names – with the exception of the Spaldings, who got their names from the world of golf (another unattainable lifestyle for the people living in Westbury), all the gangs were named after films that came to the local movie theatre.

persistence of 'woeligheid' in young people is not laid at the government's door, as little has changed in the social circumstances of the community. If we love God, says Joseph Cotty, we can love our neighbours.

The overcrowding of houses and lack of social facilities is mentioned, but Peter Faver laments the fact that the family spirit of the past is no longer there. The interviews are a ritual of cleansing, where values like love of your neighbour, reconciliation and peace are highlighted. This could be an attempt to portray a sanitised and normalised image of Westbury to television viewers, in an attempt to state clearly that residents of this community are part of the broad South African project of truth and reconciliation, part of the 'rainbow nation' which is so much part of the dominant discourse about society in South Africa after 1994.

The interviewees are at pains to point out that although poverty is still a problem; the streets are safe to walk in. Social life is reviving. The closing statements of the film indicate that

> *Hierdie gemeenskap weerspieel die verlede, hede, en toekoms van Suid-Afrika…Uniek in eie reg en gereed om enige hindernis te oorkom met leierskap, visie en passie...* (This community reflects the present, past and future of South Africa. Unique in its own right and ready to overcome any obstacle with leadership, vision and passion...)
>
> *Westbury, Plek van Hoop (2003)*

There is an allusion to how the community's history is being rewritten, an exercise which the film patently aims at initiating. The call is to stop making excuses for what happened in the past, and take control of the future.

As Bra Keith says: "I am not my father's son. I am the people's child." The problem is, of course, that it is not that simple to stop being your 'father's son'. The heritage of violence and marginalisation cannot just be shaken off.

This strong sense of community responsibility and hope for the future is undercut somewhat by the inimitable Antie Pula, who points out that some things never change:

> *Ek het gehou van die hardlopery – net nie die doodmaak nie. Mense kan mekaar maar rondjaag en skel*(...)*die anties moet skel! Ek glo nie Western kan te stil is nie, dan broei daar iets* (I liked the running around – just not the killing. People can chase each other around and berate each other – the 'aunties' must berate each other! I don't believe Western can be too quiet, then something is brewing.)
>
> *Westbury, Plek van Hoop (2003)*

As in *Waiting for Valdez,* the strong family ties in the community are emphasised and the words of Joseph Cotty could as well have been spoken by Sharkey:

> *My ouma het my iets belangrik geleer: dat dit is nié die situasie wat jy in is wat jou toekoms moet determine (nie). Sy het my altyd geleer dat eendag gaan dinge regkom, en sy het my altyd in baie nice woorde gesê dat dinge gaan regkom.* (My granny taught me an important thing : that it isn't the situation that determines your future. She always taught me that one day things will improve, and she always told me this in a nice way.)
>
> Joseph Cotty (Personal Interview, WECODEC, 2003)

The community of Westbury has constructed a film which reflects the potential of the community more than the actual current reality. The film is a strong call for community solidarity, compassion and mutual support. The past was terrible and some of the actions of community members should be condemned, but the only way to move forward is with hope and a positive spirit. It is commendable that the film could be made with so little rancour about past injustices. This spirit of co-operation can assist people to start building their daily lives according to their hopes and dreams for a communal future.

In the interviews with community members in *Westbury, Plek van Hoop,* there is a sense of optimism that reflects this sense of moving forward on the basis of past experience. Winnie Africa, when interviewed for the documentary, confirms this spirit of hope and for the future:

> *Wil ek meer hê? 'Yes I want more.' Ek wil nie meer hê vir my nie! Ek wil meer hê vir my gemeenskap! Ek wil baie dinge verander sien. Ek het 'n droom. Ek droom ek sien palm trees in Westbury. Ek sien roosbome wat groei. Al hierdie dinge. Ek sien baie goeie dinge vir Westbury. Somtyds wil ek die change te vinnig sien. I can't wait for the real change to come really. Dit is hoe ek dit sien. Dit is lekker om te lewe nou*. (Do I want more? Yes I want more. I don't want more for me! I want more for my community. I want to see many things change. I have a dream. I dream I see palm trees in Westbury. I see rose bushes growing. All these things. I see many good things for Westbury. Sometimes I want to see the change too quickly. I can't wait for the real change to come really. That's the way I see it. It's good to live now.)
>
> Winnie Africa (Personal Interview, WECODEC 2003)

Although the interviewees seem to show that they have internalised the suffering and exclusion of apartheid society and are avoiding a full re-entry into the mainstream of cultural life in the new South Africa, this should not necessarily be seen as completely negative. If there is some apprehension about (re-) joining the broader South African collective, they are demonstrating that by calling upon the interpersonal ties that have sprung from a common conception of their ethnic, if not racial, identity, they can create a sense of community:

> Ethnicity, with its sense of historical continuity and its claims to deep and meaningful – even primordial – interpersonal ties, holds out the prospect of communion and connection, of a mediating community between the individual and the large, impersonal institutions that dominate the modern world. If ethnicity does not deliver community in practice, it can do so at least in the imagination… this act of imagination is a classically ethnic act.
>
> (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998: 98-99)

Waiting for Valdez: Gangsters and Cowboys

In contrast to its namesake *Waiting for Godot,* where two characters spend a long time waiting for a hero who never arrives, but who is expected some time in the future, *Waiting for Valdez* is all about memory, about looking back. Told from the point of view of Sharkey, the film starts off with a statement about memory: *Time passes by. You remember things. You don't know why you remember them, but you do.* [23] Then, over a lyrical sequence of shots of his grandmother standing at the gate looking out at the world, Sharkey continues: *My granny used to say; you only remember important things…important things.* This situates the film from the start in the domain of memory, and as such we are given an intimation that what is about to follow is as much about nostalgia as it is about reality. We are also aware that what we are about to see is part of the 'important things' which people choose to remember.

The jerky, repetitive but lyrical shots of Sharkey's grandmother standing at the gate, ending with a shot through the front door of the house, are juxtaposed with a voice talking very fast in an African language, possibly arguing. The implication is that she is watching the world go by – warts and all – with her usual benevolence and patience. The repetition of shots of the grandmother at the garden gate, the close ups of details of her face, her rings, place her within the film's discourse as the representative of the past, the 'important things' that need to be remembered to be able to continue into the future. The granny stands for all that she tried to teach Sharkey, the stability and moral values that

[23] In the previous section, I have referenced which sections of interviews came from the interviews conducted by WECODEC and which sections were from the film itself, in the interests of making more informed comparisons. In this section, all quotations come from the film itself, so referencing was not deemed necessary.

she tried to inculcate, together with more practical advice like *"Don't forget to pray and pee."*

Much of the nostalgia in the film is centred on the figure of the granny, who is presented with great affection and compassion. The camera lingers over details of her hands and her face as she watches Sharkey sleep. To South African audiences, she is the prototype of everyone's granny, and even the radio programme she listens to ('Squad Cars') is an old favourite which people of all races would remember with nostalgia. Watching her knit Sharkey's jersey, we are reminded of the women in our own families that fed and clothed us, and this draws viewers together even in a society as racially divided as South Africa. She is a carrier of memories, and when she tells Sharkey about his past, he remarks that she is retelling the past as if the retelling would make it more concrete and preserve it: *"She talked as if she was afraid that in time the pictures might fade and in the end we would only be left with a memory of a memory."* Her attempts to construct a heritage, a bloodline, with references to his resemblance to his grandfather and uncle, even drawing a line to Sarah Baartman, the first historic icon of the Khoi, ancestors of the Coloured community, are interrupted by Pangwaan coming to call Sharkey away. In the absence of a written history of her people, she is keeping the past alive by reliving and retelling it – *"…so that I could feel it too".*

This remembering is not without pain for Sharkey, however. In recounting his longing to hear the story of *Valdez is coming,* he also has to take a long hard look at an unpleasant fact – that he was not with his grandmother when she died, that she called him and he was engaged elsewhere. Looking at the past is not something that is easy, it is an abrasive experience full of scratchy shameful bits, along with intensely

emotional memories and parts that we actually don't want to see or acknowledge at all. Toni Morrison puts it well: "We live in a land where the past is always erased…The past is absent or it's romanticised. This culture doesn't encourage dwelling on, let alone coming to terms with, the truth about the past" (Toni Morrison, in an interview with Paul Gilroy, 1993a: 179) and yet, memory is crucial for the rediscovery of a place in the world, an identity which is knocked into shape over time through remembering and experience: remembering 'important things' is crucial for this process of construction. In a continuous process of memory, current identity can be reshaped and reformed: "In seeing identity as being concerned with 'becoming', those laying claim to identity are not only positioned by identity, they are able to position themselves and are able to reconstruct and transform historical identities" (Woodward, 1998:21).

The film deals with Westbury, or Western, some twenty-five years ago. This was at the height of apartheid, and yet the difficulties of finding a place in this fragmented society are only touched upon. Despite the very real hardships of communities under apartheid, the ruptures in the fabric of society, the separation of families and social problems like alcoholism and domestic violence, *Waiting for Valdez* only refers to these issues in passing. The boys, walking home from school, wish they could go and live in Lenasia where there is a swimming pool at their friend's house, but can't because "*You're not Indian*". Pangwaan steals the money to pay Tox and Feya from his father who is too drunk to notice, thereby reminding us that we are looking at a community in crisis. But the film does not dwell on the very real issues that these throwaway lines raise. It's all about memory, trying to make sense of the emotional ties of the past.

The story of Ous' Nana is a poignant reminder of the realities of trying to negotiate the complexities of racial classification in apartheid South Africa. We are told right at the start that she was forced to move to Soweto (a township for Blacks) and that she died there. Sharkey then picks up the earlier part of the story, where Ous' Nana was still nursing her complexion and trying to become a Coloured. Obviously more than a little inebriated, she sings as she hands Sharkey the parcel with his granny's 'medicine' and makes the optimistic pronouncement: *"Who knows? I may even pass for White! No more kaffir blues for me!"*

This glimpse of the confusion and pain caused by the assigned identities of the apartheid classification system is followed by Sharkey's visit to his parents, who live in Eldorado Park, an area reserved for Coloureds. According to granny, this area offers two choices: '*…if you don't go to the beer hall, you go to the church."* She also reiterates that the government will never be able to move her away from Westbury.

In Eldorado Park, as Sharkey role-plays in the mirror, emulating his hero Valdez, his mother relives her days as a famous beauty queen at her dressing table, and his father drunkenly rails against the apartheid authorities – although in the end the worst indictment against them is that they sell warm beer. Tellingly, he displays his drunken bravado by proclaiming: *"I'll blow them away!"* just as Sharkey echoes his hero in the mirror, also saying: *"I'll blow you away!"* In the drunken perception of a washed-out, dissipated man who has suffered the indignities of apartheid, and a boy growing up in a female household without stable male role models, this is the solution to their problems- blowing them away. Tellingly, the chances of either of them ever taking action are very slim, and the audience are aware of this fact. However, the performance of the imagined action grips us and offers an opportunity to share in the emotions of the characters.

Heroes and anti-heroes

The choice of *Valdez is Coming,* a film about retribution for a transgression that can never truly be set straight, is not accidental. From the first vision of the poster of the film, we are aware that the figure of Valdez represents a complex heroic figure in the boys' minds. The poster, in fact, is coloured where the rest of the film is in black and white – giving an indication that for the boys, the film represents a fantasy dream world that is more 'real' than their own, a world where justice always triumphs (unlike the situation in their everyday lives). Feyas starts his account of the film by stating Valdez's dilemma: *"What must a man do to avenge another's death when he himself killed a man accidentally?"* The theme of vengeance and violent death give us a clue to the role of the film in providing masculine role models – role models who are not so far removed from the male role models the boys are growing up with in their community. When granny calls Sharkey directly after this, he is teased as being 'Granny's boy', a taunt that obviously cuts deep and implies that he is not as much of a 'man' as his peers. In the actual film, however, Valdez is presented as a flawed hero, a man scarred by the inadvertent killing of an innocent man. He spends the whole film trying to get compensation for the man's widow, and although he takes extreme measures to reach this goal, he never quite cuts the dashing figure that he does in the imagination of the little boys in Westbury.

The figure of Valdez, the anti-hero who becomes a hero, resonates with the experience of boys in this community. In the absence of stable family relationships in a fragmented and displaced community, membership in a gang offers a sense of self, which is rooted in a very traditional perception of what it means to be a man.

As Vigil (1993:10) noted, this offers small children limited options in terms of role models, and it is not surprising that they look to the cinema for heroes. The qualities which are mentioned in connection with Valdez (a thirst for vengeance, uncompromising quest for justice) are qualities which gang members aspire to, the consequences of which are described in detail in the descriptions of gang activities in *Westbury, Plek van Hoop,* and especially in the interviews with ex-gangsters. This sense of family, of looking after the ones in your inner circle and protecting their honour, is emphasised by Janga, an ex-gangster:

> *Ek het my familie geverdedig. En steeds nou. Al is ek nie meer 'n gangster nie, ek meen, ek verdedig hulle nog altyd. Because, ek gaan nie nou sê ek is 'n groot man of wat, maar ek meen, daar wat ek loop, my naam het nog baie weight. Jy weet, as hulle hoor daai is Janga se susters: daar is twee of drie wat sal sê, 'nei, laat ons terugstaan manne, julle weet hoe's daai man'. Maar, min weet hulle ook, ek het baie van my goeters gelos.* (I protected my family. I still protect them, even if I am no longer a gangster. Because, I won't say I am a great man or something like that, but there where I go, my name still carries weight. You know, if they hear those are Janga's sisters, there are always two or three who will say : 'nei, let's stand back, boys, you know how that man is'. But they don't know that I have left all that behind.)
>
> Janga (Personal Interview, WECODEC, 2003)

The interviewees in the WECODEC interviews do not dwell on the violence, but don't mask the intention to protect the honour of the gang, or extract vengeance. Bra Keith describes a typical gang fight :

> They were not afraid. If I want to face you we faced. It was not like now: because you stand there, you shoot me. No, if I want to face you, I took out my knife, you took out your knife, and we face each other. There wasn't a thing such as: I'll call somebody to help me. No, I fight you! If somebody dies, it is hard luck! Yeah. But they were not stabbers like these guys. If we fight, I am sure I'll stab you about three of four times, but it won't be deep enough to kill you, because

> tomorrow we can talk again and say: 'hey, *jy het my amper seer… ek sê nee, ek het jou net geleer.* (hey, you almost hurt me…I say no, I was just teaching you.) Today, you die.
> Bra Keith (Personal Interview, WECODEC, 2003:39)

The two encounters between Sharkey and the bully Monty in *Waiting for Valdez* are very different and bear closer scrutiny. The first time they meet on the playground, Sharkey is submissive, watching passively as Monty throws his books on the floor and spits on his lunch. The second time, as he watches Monty at the urinal, Sharkey fingers the coin with which he will pay for the story of *Valdez is Coming* and imagines how he could beat the bully up – this imagined beating is performed as he thinks about it. Something in his attitude communicates itself to Monty and he saunters out, ostensibly confident but not confronting Sharkey. As with the film and the figure of Valdez, it was enough to <u>imagine</u> reshaping reality. Just the imagining of his hero has given Sharkey power over his circumstances. Later, listening to the (White) head of the school rant about the lack of discipline in the school, he reminds himself that *"Valdez carries enough power to stop an army… because he has to."* Valdez, the anti-hero, will give the boys power to resist the oppression and hardship that they face. Because they have to.

The retelling of the exploits of Valdez has strong resonances with Vigil's description of how gangs listen to the war stories of *veteranos (*Vigil, 1993: 108, cited above). The setting is evocative, with the boys throwing huge shadows on the wall behind them, the firelight flickering across their faces as they listen with rapt attention. As Feya, the charismatic storyteller reaches the climax of his story of how Valdez shot an innocent man, his narrative is interrupted by a slice of real life – a man is being beaten up by four others, the reason unknown. In silence, the

boys watch this incident, and then Tox decides to call it a night – maybe fearing that further violence would interrupt the proceedings, and that there could be danger.

In their strong identification with the almost-mythical figure of Valdez, the boys find the prospect of being able to face the difficulties of their daily lives under apartheid. While they are engaged in telling the story, however, the past, represented by Sharkey's grandmother, passes on. The film ends with a lyrical sequence of Sharkey and his grandmother dancing together on the 'stoep' in front of the house – an elegy for times gone by, for values that are no longer of use in the disjointed world of the present, and a homage to a role model who cannot help him face an uncertain future. The characteristics of the gangster or cowboy Valdez, a thirst for vengeance and restored honour, are the qualities which will be more useful to him in the challenges he will face later.

Chapter 5: Conclusion: Narrative, Feeling and Remembering

The preceding chapters have aimed to show how the community of Westbury have imagined themselves and represented this imagining on film. In the absence of recorded histories and unambiguous identification with shared culture, ethnicity and geography, the representation of identity becomes contested and marginal. Through the preceding analysis it has become clear that, although the documentary genre lays claim to the representation of reality and authentic experience, documentary representation is not always as effective a vehicle for the representation of lived experience and remembered history as fiction can be.

In this study, we have examined how two distinctly different films represent the community of Westbury. *Westbury, Plek van Hoop* is about the memory of the construction of Westbury as a community, the dislocation of the community and the way in which their marginality has been constructed around this sense of dislocation. It also offers a vision of the future, of what the community can be in post-apartheid South Africa. *Waiting for Valdez* is based on the memory of a child, and represents memories of living in a marginal society through the eyes of the protagonist. In both films, certain subject positions emerge, and offer a view of the problem of community identity amongst Coloured people in South Africa after 1994. *Waiting for Valdez* does this by giving us an evocative representation of the circumstances in Westbury from which Coloured identity, however marginal, emerged, and *Westbury, Plek van Hoop* presents us with a factual account of how Westbury has emerged from the past and is facing the future.

People relate to their past and present through the use of narrative. According to Connerton (1998:26), to remember is to make sense of isolated events, to place them in a pattern. Remembered history is presented to us in a specific form, which makes it meaningful to the viewer. Narrative, according

to Roland Barthes (1988: 89), gains meaning by structure, and is a means of making sense of the world around us, of creating meaning. This creation of meaning about an uncertain past and present is the core of the two films that are examined here. This study has specifically examined how communal identity can be represented through constructing a narrative about the community. Anna de Fina (2003: 19) has pointed out how narrative can be used in the process of defining and redefining communal identity: "Through narratives people create and negotiate understandings of social realities, but they also continuously modify the social relationships that exist among them and also, potentially, with others who are not present in the interaction." The preceding chapters have examined the question of how the residents of Westbury are reworking their social relationships through narrative, and specifically filmic representation. We have also investigated how documentary and fiction approach this project differently, and how traumatic memories can be presented in specific forms for specific purposes.

When communities attempt to represent themselves on film, issues of identity and community memory become central. As has been shown in the preceding chapters, in the case of the Coloured community of Westbury, there is a fluid notion of community identity, due to the physical, social and cultural marginality of the Coloured community in South Africa before and after apartheid. This fluidity is reflected in how the community have chosen to define itself and differentiate itself from the rest of society. The documentary specifically attempts to claim a space for Westbury in a world that is transforming, however tenuous that space may be. However, when the filmmakers themselves are unsure of the reality within which they are operating, and when their subject position in relation to the world is ambiguous, this negotiation sometimes becomes a performance. This performative element in the documentary under discussion lies in what Bruzzi describes as "…the idea of disavowal, that simultaneously signals a

desire to make a conventional documentary (that is, to give an accurate account of a series of factual events) while also indicating, through the mechanisms of performance… the impossibility of the documentary's cognitive function. " (Bruzzi, 2000:155)

Stella Bruzzi describes documentary as "a negotiation between the filmmaker and reality" (Bruzzi, 2000; 154). Documentary film, as has been demonstrated in the ongoing debate about the function of documentary [24], lays some claim to the performance of truth. We like to think that, at least some of the time, a documentary will reflect an actual situation, even if this actuality is viewed through the prism of the filmmaker's personal point of view. In documentary there is an urge towards authenticity, a desire to represent the real or factual.

The cultural and social histories of coloured communities have not been recorded in any great measure. In the case of Westbury, when the community 'performs' its history based on memories of dislocation, social problems and fragmentation of community life, there are ruptures in this remembering. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Herman Wasserman (Wasserman & Jacobs, 2003: 16) has pointed out that we should not ignore issues of economic inequality and racial classification that still persist in South Africa today when evaluating issues of identity and subjectivity. He refers of the 'fault lines' of apartheid society which continue to affect even the memories of the past, and how economic inequalities and the vestiges of racial classification still linger after the end of apartheid. When communities thus remember their past, the dissonances in their present situation as compared to the past can lead to the adoption of a rhetorical position that is not necessarily related to reality. As mentioned before, Pillay (2003:286) has

[24] The capacity for documentary to represent reality is the preoccupation of a historical trajectory of documentary theorists, for example Bill Nichols (1981, 1991). Alan Rosenthal (1988), Carl Plantinga (1991), Michael Renov (1993) and Stella Bruzzi (2000).

shown how the act of placing the 'fixed' past in opposition to the 'fixed' present renders the construction of histories of this kind "a conscious political act…the fixed past is constructed through memory, fantasy, nostalgia, and from the vantage point of the present, related to relationships of power." In the face of the dissonances in present-day South African society where communities want to demonstrate their membership of a new rainbow nation in the face of continuing economic and social difficulties, coupled with the difficulties of shaking off the stereotypes of the past, the documentary which we are examining has resorted to the representation of a performance of an imagined future ideal as opposed to actual historical fact. This performative element in the documentary is exemplified and discussed in more detail below.

Performance seems almost inevitable when recounting traumatic events from the past, as is the case here. When representing the memory of shared oppression and dislocation, a true representation is virtually unattainable. It seems impossible that the true impact of events on the human psyche could be shown. Bill Nichols , 1991:230) wonders how representation can ever be "of an order of magnitude commensurate with the magnitude of what it describes?"

Slavoz Žižek discusses Lacan's conceptualisation of 'The Real' and indicates the difficulties constituting the real in a symbolic system. In his view,

> … the Real is the rock upon which every attempt at symbolisation stumbles, the hard core which remains the same in all possible worlds (symbolic universes); but at the same time its status is thoroughly precarious; it is something that persists only as failed, missed, in a shadow, and dissolves itself as soon as we try to grasp it in its positive nature.
>
> Slavoz Žižek (1989:169)

A traumatic event is therefore only able to be grasped retrospectively, and cannot be represented adequately :

> All its effectivity lies in the distortions it produces in the symbolic universe of the subject: the traumatic event is ultimately just a fantasy-construct filling out a certain void in a symbolic structure and, as such the retroactive effect of this structure
>
> Slavoz Žižek (1989:169)

When the community of Westbury therefore call upon memories of their traumatic past to reconstruct a narrative of their community, they are engaged in building this "fantasy-construct" which, according to Žižek, will always be inadequate, with a sense of 'reality' ever-escaping the grasp of both filmmakers and viewers. However, from the close reading of *Westbury, Plek van Hoop* and *Waiting for Valdez,* it would seem that there is an avenue through which an approximation of lived experience can be represented – and that avenue is through identification with the feelings and emotions of the participants and characters in the films.

In all film, whether it is fiction or documentary, viewers relate to the meaning through a subjective identification with characters in a film – through *feeling.* The viewer connects with the depicted events and characters in a film through mutual identification, by building a relationship with the characters, communities or places depicted in the film. In my view, feelings are made meaningful through narrative and it is possible for a representation to approach a sense of the real when this emotional connection can be made.

The creation of meaning through narrative functions in different ways in fiction and documentary. Through utilising a narrative structure, through testimonials voiced by the participants, the documentary can elicit an authentic feeling of lived experience, an emotive reconstruction of past

events. This hinges on the degree to which the viewer is allowed to enter into the world of the participants through sharing their feelings. In the case of past trauma, as with Westbury, these feelings could offer a window into the lived experience of the narrators. This type of testimonial can be very powerful, as has been seen in films like *Shoah (1985),* where lived experiences of the Nazi holocaust are recounted with stark simplicity but are nevertheless riveting to the viewer. In *Westbury, Plek van Hoop,* however, true identification with the lived experience of the participants escapes us, and this is largely due to the way the participants are presented within a stereotypical documentary structure, as mentioned in Chapter 4.

The expositionary style and conventional structure are problematic because the documentary does not evidence a move away from the discourse of apartheid documentaries: rather, the style is being appropriated and reconstituted in a clear demonstration that the community of Westbury wants to be part of the discourse from which they were excluded under apartheid. In attempting to perform a claim of truth through this documentary, there is a specific agenda at work – icons of the community are held up for inspection and approval, and these icons become the competing voice in a film already redolent with 'rainbow nation' rhetoric due to the florid voice over. The closing statement of the film, for instance, indicates that

> *...die gemeenskap het beheer geneem oor hul eie noodlot en deur die helingsproses en ontwikkeling herstel die gemeenskapsgees en trots*. (...the community has taken control of their own destiny and through the healing process and development, community spirit and pride are being restored.)
>
> *Westbury, Plek van Hoop, 2003*

The narration is holding up a vision of a community that is scarred but is healing, developing and looking towards a brighter future.

In the interviews with these icons from Westbury there is some recounting of the past, but these testimonies operate on the level of actuality, and seldom allow the subject's feelings to emerge – when a character reveals something intimate which sparks a connection in the viewer, it is often in a section of the interview which was not included in the final film (such as Winnie Africa's reference to her "rotten life (*vrot lewe*)".

The actual situation in Westbury after apartheid is left largely to the audience's imagination and can be gleaned when looking carefully at the subtext of the interviews. Apart from the sections that were actually excluded from the film, there are implicit elisions, which make this an even more interesting film. For example, Don Mattera doesn't live in Westbury any longer. Mrs. Daniels and others like her are still working against unbearable odds in trying to improve social conditions, even after the demise of apartheid and the coming of a new South Africa for all. The young people who tell their success stories will almost certainly leave as soon as they get a chance. Peter Faver, though not a gangster any more, obviously wields considerable personal power in the community. This force is now channeled towards social upliftment and spiritual influence, but the roots of this power lie embedded in the very history that participants in the community are eager to shake off. Could this be the start of Westbury's own community 'fault lines', which will reach into the imagined future and taint efforts to move forward?

In the case of *Westbury, Plek van Hoop,* an interesting inversion takes place in the sense that, in trying to tell the truth about their community, the filmmakers succeed in highlighting some of the dissonances in their vision of themselves and their communal identity. In attempting to situate their imagining of the community as part of the broader vision of a new South African society, the filmmakers have offered an image of a Westbury

cleansed of drugs, violence and social ills, neglecting to include information about the very real problems that the community is facing in all areas: social, economic and political. In post-apartheid South Africa, they are no longer the "…Twilight people living in a twilight area…" that Don Mattera so evocatively describes in his poem (quoted in a previous chapter). However, the vision of their communal future which the film offers hardly seems less ambiguous, despite the evidence that this future is earnestly desired by participants in the film.

Richard Werbner (1998:157) refers to mechanisms by which nostalgia can be used for the ideological rejection of 'pasts':

> First, within society, a yearning for a past, an evocation of a collective memory, may occur in the context of a *culturally specific image of the future.* Here nostalgia as a yearning for a past engages in a dialogue with utopia, a longing for a perceived future state or condition.
>
> Richard Werbner (1998:157)

The second feature of nostalgia is where the past is not something that we wish to remember, and we therefore indulge in a process of "…wilfully disempowering the past" (ibid:157). These two features of nostalgia are characteristic of the mechanisms at work in this documentary – elements of the past (and the present situation) which need to be forgotten are 'disempowered' or 'marginalised', while a future utopian state is held up as the ideal towards which Westbury is moving.

In the process of reconstructing the past in the documentary, the community demonstrates a clear desire to be part of the mainstream of post-apartheid South African society, where the emphasis is on reconciliation and the ideology of repentance and forgiveness – a "post- truth and reconciliation society" where past transgressions need to be taken out, looked at and confronted, and not swept under the carpet.

Instead of subverting the stereotypes of the community as violent and unstable, filled with dangerous people, the interviewees hold up an image of a community trying to atone for their sins. The possibility that there could be some gangsters or drug dealers still operational in the community is mentioned in passing. The interviews are a ritual of cleansing, where values like love of your neighbour, reconciliation and peace are highlighted. If we love God, says Joseph Cotty, we can love our neighbours. This cleansing ritual reminds us of Ebrahim Rasool's statement cited in the previous chapter (Rasool, 1996:56): "Coloured consciousness and identity, rather than being self-aware, empowering and confident, is constructed fearfully, out of threat and opposition, and defined in negative relation to the other, not through a positive perception of the self." This sense of internalised guilt, of trying not to look too hard at the injustices of the past, is part of a broader discourse in South Africa today. In the spirit of reconciliation, raking up past hurts and healing trauma through memory is an act that is somehow regarded as distasteful and fraught with political implications.

The closing statements of the film allude to how the community's history is being rewritten, an exercise which the film patently aims at initiating. The call is to stop making excuses for what happened in the past, and take control of the future. The documentary is performative in the sense that the whole community, the icons chosen to be interviewed and the filmmakers, are performing a desire, an aspiration of what they would like the community to be. The dissonances and elisions serve to make this an uncomfortable film to watch – we ask ourselves throughout: can this be real?

Interestingly, although the political changes in South Africa have made it possible for the community of Westbury to embrace a position in the mainstream of society, it seems as if they are still claiming a marginal space

of identification. In remembering the stereotypes of the past, they are claiming identification with other, less obvious stereotypes: the redeemed gangster, the ambitious youth who escapes the ghetto, the tireless worker for social upliftment.

These observations should not diminish its worth as a representative text. What makes the film interesting is not the filmic technique or innovation on a technical level, but the people who participate in relating the story of Westbury. These are the real people from the community, who can claim an authenticity of lived experience and hence their testimony serves as a 'truth'. Choices about what should be included, or excluded, were made by the people themselves. For all its flaws as a film, this documentary is embedded in the lived experience of the people who made it, and as such reflects the people of Westbury from their point of view.

In the absence of written histories and deep-rooted, collective cultural codes, the representation of an imagined communal identity becomes a reconstruction of remembered histories. This remembrance of the past is accomplished somewhat inadequately in the documentary, and seems to be more comfortably accomplished in *Waiting for Valdez.* The documentary genre seems to be an inadequate vehicle for the depiction of truth in a society like South Africa, where relating facts about the past cause a level of discomfort in the present reconciliatory climate. This may be because documentary usually aims at creating cognitive understanding of facts and information, whereas fiction calls upon feeling and emotion for its effects. In fiction, remembrance of the past can be reinterpreted and re-enacted without the danger of moving too close to uncomfortable present realities – because fiction masks its relation to fact by calling upon emotion and feeling in a more direct fashion, it becomes possible to represent what mere factual documentation cannot. Moreover, it becomes possible for the viewer to have

a very real sense of identification with the feelings of the characters, and through these feelings to relate to the narrative in a direct way.

Waiting for Valdez reflects greater reality because fiction has the power to capture the *texture of the memory* of reality. We need to believe that documentary is aimed at giving us some kind of performance of truth. In principle, fiction can perhaps get closer to the truth through reconstructing memories through textures of feelings that we can relate to. *Waiting for Valdez* is about memory, about looking back. Because the film doesn't have a political or factual agenda, *Waiting for Valdez* offers the viewer a greater feeling of authenticity than the *Westbury, Plek van Hoop.* The documentary chooses to perform one moment in time – a possible moment in the future when the community will be healed, and whole. In the documentary, there is a blurring of the boundaries between fact and fiction – this porousness aims to capture a sense of reality, a performance of a desired reality. *Waiting for Valdez* approaches the texture of the moment closer, because it has no claim to objectivity, and can indulge in the emotional texture of memory. In the subjectivity of memory, some kernel of truth can be found. Within the narrative structure the viewers are allowed to tap into an authentic feeling of lived experience, as if they themselves are remembering the past.

Thus, although both films try to represent history and communal memory and the past trauma of the community under apartheid, the fiction piece succeeds to a greater extent because it relies on the representation of certain memories and feelings, memories that could be disavowed as factual representation if it were to become uncomfortable. In addition, the memories are presented from a child's point of view, which infuses the film with a subjectivity which can easily be dismissed as 'not real'. On the other hand, the documentary leaves the viewer somewhat perplexed and dissatisfied; wondering if this is really true. Where *Waiting for Valdez* is remembering a

state of living the marginality caused by dislocation and racial classification, *Westbury, Plek van Hoop* offers a performance of a different kind of marginality. The icons of the community who are held up as examples construct a new binary for the audience's perusal – instead of past stereotype of drug addicts, gangsters and prostitutes (as opposed to the rest of 'normal' society), we now see reformed gangsters, upwardly mobile youth and tireless religious and social workers wiping the slate clean (as opposed to the silenced voices of the current residents who may still take drugs, do crime and be unemployed). Thus within the film certain voices are silenced, marginal groups are disavowed, and a new stereotype emerges which is appropriate for the new South Africa.

From the documentary, it would seem that the people of Westbury, like certain other Coloured communities in South Africa today, have elected to reiterate, if not perpetuate, their marginal status and collective sense of marginality. Instead of moving towards the future in confidence, they are revisiting the past in an attempt to show how they will correct their mistakes in future. This is not necessarily a negative – this 'bricolage', cultural borrowing and pastiche, whether from colonial examples or previously unrecorded histories, could also suggest ways in which the disparities in official histories can be addressed, and the memories of marginalised subjects can be re-integrated into new narratives of South African society. Whether these narratives are presented in documentary or fictional form, the stories of Coloured communities in places like Westbury should be allowed to take their place in the canon of remembered histories of our collective past.

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