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Performing black masculinities: Johannesburg's performance poets and their counter narratives of resistance to normative ideas of black malehood in mainstream cinema

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ABSTRACT

The politics of representation around racialized gendered identities is one that is particularly crucial in a country whose historical discourse privileged racist and sexist constructions of blackness. Dominant cinema (i.e. Classic Hollywood Cinema) has since its inception rendered black identities 'invisible' by representing an idea of blackness that signifies sub-humanness, infantilism, hypersexualization, inherent criminalization. This paper postulates that the South African mainstream cinema landscape has largely utilized classic Hollywood cinema's strategies in its representation of blackness and it continues to maintain regressive constructions particularly in relation to black masculinities. The South African gangster film genre has played a particularly pertinent role in signifying the 'Otherness' of black malehood.

This paper aims to re-imagine normative notions of black malehood in South African mainstream cinema. It proposes that performance poetry serves as a vehicle through which young black male poets in Johannesburg re-conceptualize popular media's normative representations of black masculinities. Their poetry functions as a conduit that confronts and challenges stereotypical images of black malehood in South African mainstream cinema and in popular media in general.