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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DECLARATION

I declare that this is my own unaided work, save insofar as indicated in the acknowledgements and references. It is being submitted in partial fulfillment for the degree of Master of Arts in Film and Television, in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Belinda K. Shange

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INTRODUCTION

In a country that has a ‘not so long ago’ history of constructing blackness as inferior, sub-human, infantile, ‘exotic’, hypersexual, inherently criminalized and the ‘Other’, it becomes imperative to re-imagine and perhaps ‘redress’ regressive conceptions of blackness. The reality of colonialism and the formalization of apartheid in South Africa serve as key motivators to subvert ideas that have been naturalized through the racist and sexist discourse of these eras.

In this section I will utilize bell hooks' strategy of the “oppositional gaze” in order to recuperate popular images of black male experiences as represented in South African mainstream cinema. In her chapter titled “The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators” in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* bell hooks conceives the idea of spectatorship as a political one wherein she states that there is “power in looking” (1992: 288). This means that as a spectator, one can utilize ‘looking’ as a tool to question and destabilize what one is confronted with on celluloid. She traces the politicization of ‘looking’ to slavery wherein “racialized power relations…denied [slaves] their right to gaze” (1992: 288). One can deduce from hooks’ idea of ‘looking’ that the practice of filmmaking and its spectatorship is imbued with power relations given that film mobilizes visual imagery to not only re-present its subjects/subject matter but to also naturalize/ make dominant/ normalise what it re-presents.

Classic Hollywood Cinema (CHC) typically assigns the role of 'voyeur' to the spectator by constructing an implicit distance between him/her and the visual text through the notion of 'suspending disbelief'. Cinematic strategies such as the dimming of lights, conventional 'pulpit seating', expected silence during film screening after an array of trailer screenings, announcements to switch off phones etc. characterize the etiquette used to usher the spectator into 'suspension' from reality or immediate surroundings. This state of 'suspension' means that the spectator acknowledges the existence of an uninterruptable 'fourth wall' and thereby accepting the codes and conventions of 'the world' constructed within the frame of a camera. By acknowledging the 'fourth wall', the spectator is then expected to read the images within the codes and conventions of the narrative constructed on celluloid.

hooks' theory of the 'oppositional gaze' destabilizes the "fourth wall", as it requires the spectator to come out of 'suspension' into a mode where s/he conceives the process of image making as political. The act of 'looking back' allows the spectator agency, which in turn encourages a more dialogical interaction between the visual text and the spectator. hooks refers to the idea of 'the gaze' to denote this agency. When one studies the definition of the term 'gaze', one realizes that it symbolizes a more proactive practice of looking. *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary: International Student's Edition* defines the term 'gaze' as "to look steadily at something for a long time, either because you are very interested or surprised, or because you are thinking of something else" (Hornby, 2005:617). This definition evidently points to a more active role that a spectator occupies when s/he begins to use his/her 'look' beyond the act of visual consumption for entertainment value.

hooks (1992: 289) further elaborates on the notion of the "gaze" where she states that

> The "gaze" has been and is a site of resistance for colonized Black people globally. Subordinates in relations of power learn experientially that there is a critical gaze, one that "looks" to document, one that is oppositional. In resistance struggle, the power of the dominated to assert agency by claiming and cultivating "awareness" politicizes looking relations-one learns to look a certain way in order to resist.

It is clear from hooks' above statement that resistance is crucial in the act of re-imagining. The idea of offering counter narratives to popular media's dominant narratives is one that is necessary and empowering.

In the context of this study, the notion of "looking back" applies to the poets who are confronted with popular images that serve to epitomize black male experiences in contemporary society. As black males that are interested in utilizing spoken word poetry as a mode of expression and interrogation, the poets endeavour to construct counter-narratives that aim to destabilize normalized ideas around what it means to be black and male in society.

Through hooks' notion of the racialised "gaze", the poets negotiate their own experiences and identities in relation to stereotypical images of black malehood. hooks expands on the racialisation of the gaze by asserting that "we can both interrogate the gaze of the Other but also

look back, and at one another, naming what we see" (1992: 289). hooks' assertion suggests that in each poet's 'look' lies the power to visually register and utter how he feels about what he sees. The poets in this case utter that which they feel about images that represent a construction of black maleness. They name what they see as problematic and thereby locate themselves within a more proactive subject position as black male spectators. Their process of analysis is captured through their individual interviews in *Rainbow's Men* wherein they each dissect /"look back" / "gaze" at the popular images that have been captured on celluloid.

For instance, Donald "Neosapien" Mokgale locates the construction of images of black maleness within the context of racialism and sexism. He states that during apartheid, the black male figure was viewed within the framework of collective racial politics whereby he vigorously defied the Nationalist Party's segregationist "separate development" policy and actively challenged the assumed superiority of white heterosexual maleness. For Mokgale, the black male's involvement in the socio-political discourse of the time meant that he was revered and valued. Mokgale goes as far as stating that even the criminalized male figure was understood to play a pertinent role in society during apartheid. The black male figure's acts of criminalisation were not perceived as unscrupulous, rather they were recognized as being part of a larger social discourse where resources were distributed (or not distributed) along racial lines. Additionally, Mokgale notes the irony of post-apartheid's "post-racial" agenda, which is blind to the persistent idea that criminal activity is inevitably concomitant of the black male experience.

He uses the term "urban jungle" to refer to the society that he currently finds himself in as a young black male in Johannesburg. His observation contextualises the city of Johannesburg within a white, capitalist and hetero-patriarchal framework that customarily conceives of the black male body as a corporeal productive force. Mokgale proposes that in his corporeality the black male becomes an object that incites fear and dread as he manoeuvres through spaces occupied by the white phallocentric world. Futhermore, he implies that through this process, the black community at large internalises white phallocentric ideas on black masculinities. However, Mokgale misses a great opportunity to problematise hetero-patriarchy as a heterosexual male who occupies a position of privilege in a world governed by phallocentric and heterosexist norms and conventions.

In his attempt to "look back" at popular representations of black maleness, Mokgale ends up reinforcing patriarchal views of the apartheid struggle by linking the political discourse of the time solely with maleness. He collapses womanhood into a collective personhood and thereby falls short of naming the struggles that women face within a hetero-patriarchal world. In this context, Mokgale's racialized "gaze" is imbued with conventional gendered ideas.

Conversely, Richard "Quaz" Roodt notes the gender dynamics in the representation of popular images of black males. He uses rap to talk about the prevalence of misogyny in hip hop. It is very significant to take note of the fact that Roodt draws most of his examples from the United States of America (USA). This points to the pervasiveness of American popular culture outside of the USA. This observation also highlights how powerful and dominant images from Hollywood are.

Roodt recognises the assumed emotional unavailability of black males in popular media as a motif and through poetry he begins to disrupt normative ideas that attempt to legitimize the inadequacy of black males. Roodt also acknowledges the complexities of race politics as he adds another layer to the notion of blackness. He talks about his coloured identity and elaborates on the existence of stereotypical ideas around coloured identity in South Africa. He speaks about the issue of colourism (discrimination bases upon one's skin tone) as playing a huge role in his own identity as a coloured male. He refers to the idea that coloured males are expected to have a light skin tone and that they are commonly assumed not to identify with the term "black". He refers to himself as a "walking anti-stereotype" as he identifies with both the terms "coloured" and "black". Roodt's position suggests that identity is malleable and constructed. He fluidly moves in and out of South Africa's demarcated "racial profiles" and in fact makes an interesting observation on how black and coloured males are similarly represented in popular media. He notes that coloured males are also typically represented as emotionally detached, "up-to-no-good", criminalised delinquents.

In Mutle Mothibe's act of "looking back" and naming what he is, he proposes that black men in contemporary society have been misconstrued. Mothibe states that for him, the black male is

resourceful, creative and driven to form constructive relationships with women and children. He tackles the notion of race by questioning why black males in particular are commonly assumed to lack the capacity to be present fathers and active relationship partners. He states that it is not necessarily a race issue that such men exist; rather it is a case of varying circumstances that lead to the absence of positive male figures. Mothibe problematises talk shows (i.e. *The Ricki Lake show*, *Dr. Phil* and *The Jerry Springer show*) that use the "reality" show model in order to present themselves as accurately representative of the state of the black community.

Mothibe draws his examples of black male progression from the USA, Nigeria and South Africa. He refers to the writers Ben Okri and K. Sello Duiker as examples of positive black male figures that challenge the stereotypical image of the fucked up, sex-driven, freak-like black male whose actions are propelled by his phallus. Mothibe also uses Jay-Z as an example of how black males have used the creative industry as a means through which they can economically elevate themselves out of poverty and strife. Nonetheless, Mothibe misses the platform to engage with the issue of misogyny within the creative economy. For instance, Jay Z's work is known for its sexist undertones. Furthermore, Mothibe's oversights are reflective of the ubiquitous hetero-sexist mind-set that governs everyday life.

It is clear that the act of "looking back" is complex in that it requires one to be vigilant in identifying one's own contradictions. This is particularly the case in the context of societal norms and values.

The Politics of Representation: Black Masculinities in Mainstream Cinema

In this section I will be exploring how mainstream cinema as a medium that is involved in the process of image making becomes politicized through the theory of representation. I investigate how the 'difference' and 'otherness' of black males is continuously valorized through this visual medium.

I postulate that classic Hollywood cinema has served as a platform through which black males have been marginalized and 'othered' as innately primitive, 'different', suspect, philandering and unresponsive. In his book titled *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* Stuart Hall affirms popular media's "secret fascination with Otherness" (1997:225) by drawing a parallel between historical and contemporary representations of 'otherness'. He asks, "Have the repertoires of representation around 'difference' and 'otherness' changed or do earlier traces remain intact in contemporary society?" (1997:225).

The question that he poses is fundamental because it takes into consideration the intertextuality of texts through historical practices of representation. Hall makes a significant point in linking the contemporary and the historical because texts do not exist in isolation; rather, they refer to a larger social landscape and culture which constantly produces and re-produces dominant norms and values. What this means is that in order for one to critically analyze contemporary representations of black masculinities, one needs to consider the historical inventory of popular images that have addressed this idea of black maleness.

In his chapter titled *The Black Man and Psychopathology* (1967), Frantz Fanon proposes that popular images are significant as they play a crucial role in the construction of the 'othered'. He states, "a host of information and series of propositions slowly and stealthily work their way into an individual through books, newspapers, school texts, advertisements, movies, and radio and shape his community's vision of the world" (1967:131). What this means is that mass media is one of the key social apparatuses that play a vital role in how individuals deconstruct the world around them. Consequently, the proliferation of popular images and narratives that propagate the 'otherness' and 'difference' of black males is problematic.

Stuart Hall and bell hooks extensively explore the process of 'othering'. They state that race, gender and ethnicity (among other aspects of identity) are utilized as key signifiers of 'otherness' by popular media. hooks (1992) insists that race and gender politics have historically been embedded in mainstream cinema. Both hooks and Hall's observations are key because they recognize the intersectionality of identity. Their recognition of gender as a key influential factor in how black males experience their racialised selves is important. Hall further politicizes the act of re-presenting 'an-Other' by stating that "representation is…complex…especially when dealing with 'difference', it engages feelings, attitudes and emotions and it mobilizes fears and anxieties in the viewer" (1997: 226). Hall's association of 'otherness' and difference is a crucial one in that it recognizes the reality of minoritisation.

According to Özlem Sensoy and Robin Di Angelo's *Is Everyone Really Equal- An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education* (2012:186) a minoritised group is defined as

> A social group that is devalued in society. This devaluing encompasses how the group is represented, what degree of access to resources it is granted, and how the unequal access is rationalized. Traditionally, a group in this position has been referred to as a minority group. However, this language has been replaced with the term minoritised in order to capture the active dynamics that create the lower status in society and also to signal that a group's status is not necessarily related to how many or few of them they are in the population at large.

Sensoy and Di Angelo's observations are particularly pertinent in the case of South Africa where the black people constitute the majority of the country's population. It is crucial that the issue of minoritisation is not dismissed on the basis of statistical population discourses.

Hall suggests that representation is more than just about the spectacle of images that do not carry a larger connotative meaning. He proposes that images evoke and trigger emotional responses as well as affirm or challenge the worldviews of spectators. He elaborates on how images function to produce meaning in spectators. He states that although images are polysemic (i.e. they have multiple meanings) for different spectators, the practice of representation aims to privilege one dominant meaning over other possible meanings. He calls this dominant meaning a "preferred meaning" (1997:228). He suggests that when one deals critically with images, one should

askhim/herself the question "which of the many meanings…does [any medium][1]mean to privilege"? The idea of "preferred meaning" is useful in that it acknowledges the politics of power in meaning construction. In the case of cinema for instance, the director and the production team's creative choices (i.e. characterization, set design, editing, lighting, costuming, dialogue, sound, shot sizes and angles) shape the construction of the dominant meaning. Every choice that is made in the cinematic context is intentional. In the case of the representation of black masculinities, one must continuously study the creative/technical choices made by the director and his/her production team.

When one looks at the film *The Birth of a Nation*[2] (Griffith, 1915), one realizes that the 'otherness' of black masculinities has been marked since the early stages of cinema. One haunting character in the film is Gus, a 'black male' who is a freedman, soldier and a newly appointed captain. He is represented to have an unquenchable sexual obsession with Flora Cameron, the white daughter of a renowned physician. He declares his desire to marry her and in fear she runs off into the forest where he continuously pursues her. His preoccupation with her is so immense that he chases to her suicidal demise over a cliff. The idea that the black male is driven by his voracious sexual libido (instead of his mind) to a point of murder is disturbing. Gus' sexual obsession subsequently leads to the formation of a white supremacist organization called the Ku Klux Clan whose aim is not only to capture and exterminate him but it also commits atrocious acts of race-based murders.

This film glorifies and justifies the formation of the Ku Klux Clan by suggesting that black men are a threat to white womanhood(s). It suggests that black males could possibly contaminate whiteness through the black man's sexual prowess. The solution is therefore to obliterate the black man to avoid any possible chance of miscegenation. Gus' character fulfills the stereotype of the 'Bad Buck' who is defined as a black male that is "physically big, strong, no good, violent, renegade…'on a rampage'…oversexed & savage, violent & frenzied as [he]3 lust[s]4 for white flesh" (Donald Bogle in Hall, 1997:251).

[1] My addition

[2] This film is set within the context of the civil war and the reconstruction eras in America. It revolves around two families (the Camerons and the Stonemans) that have an amiable relationship, which is disrupted by external political turmoil (i.e. the pro-union north and pro-confederancy south conflict, and the assassination of Abraham Lincoln). This film documents these families' lives in parallel with key political moments in American history.

Additionally, Walter Long (a white male actor) dorns “black face” in order to portray Gus. Long’s act of minstrelising black male identity is congruent with Fanon’s idea of the projection of white male anxiety around black male sexuality. This means that the black male’s physicality is only constructed as a “phobogenic object” (1967:129) that solicits fear and anxiety which gives meaning to the white phallocentric world.

hooks reiterates the hypersexualization of black males in the chapter titled “Reconstructing Black Masculinity” in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (1992: 90). She proposes that white males are commonly fascinated with blackness and black masculinities. She states that this fascination is “fantasized in the racist white imagination, [as] the quintessential embodiment of man as ‘outsider’ or rebel” (1992: 90). hooks’ observation on white male fascination is significant as it highlights the power dynamics that play themselves out through representation.

Long's portrayal of blackness is superficial and corporeal. He is capable of representing blackness at its worst only for a period of 190 minutes and thereafter he switches back to his normative ‘civilized’ white male self that is not driven by his phallus but by his character and intellect. What politicizes Long's representation of black male identity is the reality of colonialism and racialism that framed blackness within a prehistoric and mythological imaginary. Furthermore, as a seminal text, *Birth of a Nation* (Griffith, 1915) becomes a significant visual reference that informs how filmmakers particularly black filmmakers approach the subject of black maleness.

Fanon’s notion of the “white gaze” (1967:128) is useful in demonstrating the construction of the ‘difference’ and ‘otherness’ of black masculinities in popular media. Fanon proposes that the “white gaze” utilizes eroticization and fetishization as strategies to mark the ‘otherness’ of black masculinities. This means that the relationship between whiteness and the construction of black masculinities is crucial and relevant. Fanon suggests that the black male becomes a site of fascination and ‘othering’ through the ‘white gaze’. He states, “The true ‘Other’ for the white man is and remains the black man, and vice versa. For the white man, however, ‘the Other’ is perceived as a bodily image, absolutely as non ego, i.e., unidentifiable, the unassimilable” (Fanon, 1967: 139).

He proposes that the black male body becomes a critical site of eroticization because of the colonial stereotype of the hypersexualisation and eroticization of the black male body. He asks, "Is the black man's sexual superiority real?" and he responds by saying that "Everyone knows it isn't" (ibid:137) and thereby demystifying the assumed hypersexual nature of black males. Fanon's observation demonstrates that the black male is not only racialized but that he is also highly sexualized.

Fanon states that a psychoanalytical approach to racial issues as experienced through individual consciousnesses requires the consideration of sexual phenomena as a key component (ibid:138). Therefore, the black male body as a site of overt sexuality is functional in understanding the notion of black or racialised masculinities from a psychoanalytical view. Fanon's idea of the fear and anxiety that surrounds the black male's hypersexuality suggests that the black male's "corporeality" (Fanon 1967:142) is privileged over his intelligence, spirituality and emotional life. This means that whiteness constructs virility as the absolute sexual ideal and therefore the castration of black malehood(s) is justified by the white male's "feeling of inadequacy in relation to the black man, who is perceived as a penis symbol" (1967:137). Therefore the black male is visually and ideologically castrated through cinematic representations. Fanon maintains that "the black man is attacked in his corporeality. It is his tangible personality that is lynched. It is his actual being that is dangerous" (1967:142). I argue that even in the face of a supposed post-colonial/ post-racial context, this image is maintained.

For instance, when one analyses *Cry the Beloved Country*[3] (Singh, 1995), which is one of South Africa's first post-apartheid films, one realizes that the seeming inferiority of black masculinities is maintained. This is suggested through assigning the role of the protagonist to a character (Reverend Stephen Kumalo) that does not challenge nor question the politics of apartheid in the name of religion. Rev. Kumalo is juxtaposed with James Javis, a white farmer whose starting

[3] The film revolves around a pastor (Rev. Stephen Kumalo) who goes on a journey from Endotsheni in Kwazulu Natal to Johannesburg in search of his long lost son (Absolom Kumalo) and sister. Through his journey, the spectator is introduced to a young protégé (Theopilus Msimangu) who follows in his footsteps as a pastor himself. Msimangu accompanies the Rev. through Johannesburg as they search and eventually find his now criminalised son. The film then focuses on the issue of the criminalised son who has mistakenly killed a white man's son, Ian Javis and the repercussions that he faces.

point of view is openly racist until the death of his son Ian Javis. Ian Javis is shot by Absolom Kumalo, the Reverend's son. As the film progresses, James Javis is redeemed through the discovery of his son's journals. These journals openly oppose racial oppression and Christian ideologies that disregard the reality of racial segregation. As the film progresses, James Javis is redeemed through the discovery of his son's journals. These journals openly oppose racial oppression and Christian ideologies that disregard the reality of racial segregation.

James Javis' 'change of heart' is instigated by reading Ian Javis' views, which lead him to a boxing gym that Ian Javis founded. Ian Javis is constructed as a martyr and a saviour of blackness in this film. This "white saviour syndrome" is best captured in a scene where the boxing gym's manager who is a black man states, "He's the only man who's ever seen me for who I really am" (Singh, 1995). This statement is heard by an emotional James Javis who then decides to finally treat black people as human beings. This swift transformation is thoroughly surprising as James Javis in earlier scenes referred to the black men who shot his son as a "gang of natives" and he openly refused to shake the hand of a nameless black man who gestured a handshake in order to offer his condolences at Ian Javis' funeral.

One wonders why Rev. Kumalo has no transformative moments of politicization as a black man who has experiential knowledge of racial oppression. Rev. Kumalo's younger brother, John Kumalo a politician who is black conscious and forthright about the state of affairs in the country is constructed as a menace through the eyes of Rev. Kumalo and his young protégé Theopilus Msimangu who observes that John Kumalo "ha(s) no use for the church anymore" as he states that "what God has not done for South Africa, man must do" (Singh, 1995). John Kumalo has agency and a cause that drives his statements and actions. However, he is represented as corrupt for wanting to appoint a lawyer for his son who is also implicated in the murder of Ian Javis. As a result of John Kumalo's active role in his own son's life, his son is absolved.

On the other hand, Rev. Kumalo's only preoccupation is his son's marriage to a woman he impregnated before he was charged with murder. The Reverend's convictions are misplaced and problematic. Surely what is of key importance is to defend his son to ensure that his grandchild has a present father. An elaborate scene is dedicated to the marriage between the Reverend's son

and his fiancé in prison. It is clear in the Reverend's actions that he is capable of defending an idea that he feels convicted about. Surely if he can organise a wedding in a high security prison, then he should have the agency to appoint the best possible legal representation for his son. On the day of Absolom's hanging, the only agency that the Reverend is assigned is a journey to a mountain top where he kneels and looks up into the abyss hoping that his son's soul finds rest. This image lingers on screen as the film ends and it rightly captures the stance of the 'Uncle Tom' stereotype which is defined as "the good Negro…always 'chased, harassed, hounded, flogged, enslaved and insulted, [he] keep[s] the faith, ne'er turn[s] against [his] white massa…and remain[s] hearty, submissive, stoic, generous, selfless and oh-so-kind" (Donald Bogle in Hall, 1997:251). *Cry the Beloved Country* (Singh, 1995) suggests that blackness is about supplication and unending spiritual belief without any real agency. While a white man is building recreational facilities for disgruntled and oppressed black people, the Reverend gets on his knees with an inactive stare into the open skies.

These stereotypical images of black masculinities as inactive; uncritical; uncaring; violent and oversexed continue to exist in contemporary society. The image of the thuggish, abusive and criminal 'Bad Buck' continues to be perpetuated in popular media. bell hooks' chapter titled "Don't Make Me Hurt You: Black Male Violence" in *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (2004) proposes that Gangsta rap is one example of popular media that advances the stereotype of the aggressive and destructive black male by constructing and projecting a gangster persona that emphasizes the idea that violence is inherent in black men. Although bell hooks locates Gangsta rap within an African American discourse, its negative representation of young black masculinities resonates with South Africa and the rest of the globe. Therefore, American gangsta rap as a lyrical popular form that is largely consumed by the youth in South Africa and the rest of the world maintains a dominant narrative that affirms the violence and criminality of young black males.

This study critically re-considers dominant narratives that conceive young black males as ruthless *tsotsi* figures in crime-ridden post-apartheid South Africa. In her essay titled *Redeeming*

Features: From Tsotsi (1980) to Tsotsi (2006), Lindiwe Dovey defines a *tsotsi*[4] as a type of hardened criminal who functioned within the larger South African township context from the 1930s and beyond (2007:153). Dovey (2007) claims that the term *tsotsi* stems from the word zoot suit, which is a type of style that *tsotsis* from the 1930s and 1940s used to wear. The term zoot suit was subsequently adapted into the Sesotho word *tsotsa*, which translates as 'dressing flashily'. Dovey (2007) states that the 1950s onwards produced a type of *tsotsi* that fell into one of two categories. The *tsotsi* figure was either polished and well-dressed gangster (who was sartorially inspired by American/Sophiatown culture at the time) whose success stemmed from his dealings with whites or Asians or he was a small-time aspirant gangster who functioned out of the need to escape his poverty stricken background and often worked for the more established gangster.

Dovey's association of the *tsotsi* figure with a certain sartorial style continues to be perpetuated in popular representations of black masculinities. This means that particular clothing items over time have come to connote criminality. In South African gangster films for instance, All Star sneakers, *spotis* (i.e. a type of hat that *pantsulas*[5] wear as part of their subculture), *kotoyis* (i.e. a type of woolen hat that pantsulas wear), *Dickies* trousers, black leather jackets, 'wife beaters' (i.e. white vests), gold chains, *Florsheim* shoes, *Stanton* hats, hoodies and sagging pants are but a few examples of clothing that is used to mark black males as criminally inclined. The criminalization of these clothing items has meant that black masculinities that have adopted some of the mentioned sartorial styles have been racially and ethnically profiled and thus 'othered'.

[4] According to Dovey, the *tsotsis* speak *tsotsi-taal*, which is a combination of IsiXhosa, IsiZulu, Sesotho, Setswana, Spanish and Afrikaans (a major component of *tsotsi-taal* that Dovey does not mention).

[5] *Isi-pantsula* is a township subculture, which according to Mpolokeng Bogatsu in *Loxion Kulcha': Fashioning Black Youth Culture in Post-apartheid South Africa* (2000) originated in the 1950s and sartorially mimicked American and English trends. He uses the term "Loxion culture" as a synonym for township culture as he states, "contemporary Loxion culture (though rooted in the local) appropriates global standards".

The idea of clothing as a signifier of meaning is best captured by Carol Delaney's statement in *Investigating Culture: An Experiential Introduction to Anthropology* (2004). According to Delaney (ibid:323),

> Clothes do not merely protect us from the elements, they also express cultural meanings and identities and serve as markers of status, age, and gender as well as occupation, activity, degree of formality, and a host of other things. Like non-verbal signs, these markers not only distinguish individuals and groups from each other, they are also a means whereby we tend to "place" people in their social context.

What is insightful about Delaney's statement on the idea of "placing" one into a certain social context based on their dress code is that some clothing items are pathologised[6]. Delaney's idea of creating distinctions based on one's dress code is characteristic of the practice of profiling/stereotyping.

Hall asserts that stereotyping "reduces people to a few, simple, essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed in Nature" (1997:257). It is clear from Hall's assertion that through stereotyping, superficial features such as appearance become defining points for certain social groups. Their corporeality becomes a point of reference that is inescapable and 'fixed' in popular media. For example, black male identities that identify with the *pantsula* subculture are popularly represented as *tsotsis* as a result of their dress code (i.e. *Dickies*, *Spotis*, and All Star sneakers) and language (i.e. *tsotsi taal*). A film such as *Tsotsi*[7] (Hood, 2005) normalizes this association by constructing the protagonist (David) and his criminal companions as black males whose dress code mimics the *pantsula* subculture.

The use of the *pantsula* subculture's language (i.e. *tsotsi taal*) by characters that are symbolized as deceitful and devious is problematic in that *tsotsi taal* becomes marked as inferior and marginal. In the film *Tsotsi* (Hood, 2005) for instance, the middle to upper class, and educated characters speak fluent English and 'uncontaminated' African languages. The choice to assign

[6] Popular media has for instance used the hoodie as a symbol of delinquency and violent behavior in black masculinities.

[7] *Tsotsi* (Hood, 2005) is based on a novel by Athol Fugard (1980). It follows the life of a young antagonistic township gangster who finds himself in a predicament as he mistakenly inherits an infant during one of his hijackings.

tsotsi taal to characters that slay and murder removes the agency that comes with the power of creolizing non-indigenous languages with indigenous ones. *Tsotsi-taal* as a language that was formed by young black South Africans during apartheid was a symbol of defiance that challenged imperialist norms and values. Evidently, one cannot dismiss the power in the fact that *tsotsi taal* and other indigenous South African languages have become a norm in mainstream cinema through films such as *Mapantsula* (Schimtz,1988), *Tsotsi* (Hood, 2005), *Jerusalema* (Ziman, 2008), *Hijack Stories* (Schmitz, 2000), and *How to Steal 2 Million* (Mvundla, 2011). Similarly, one cannot assume that by virtue of a film falling into the gangster genre, that it cannot progressively utilize the *tsotsi* stereotype. *Mapantsula* (Schmitz, 1988) is a key example of how stereotypes can be re-imagined to subvert normative ideas around black masculinities.

Mapantsula (Schmitz, 1988) revolves around a small time township gangster (Panic) who ends up being arrested for alleged anti-government activity. Through the use of flashbacks the film traces Panic's earlier actions that lead to his subsequent arrest. He is interrogated and tortured by the police in an effort to get him to expose the political activities of comrades. His life as an unemployed pickpocket who takes advantage of his girlfriend (Pat), his landlady (Ma Modise) and the community is reflected on but by the end of the narrative, he has developed a sense of political consciousness.

Thando Zuma in Beittel's *Mapantsula: Cinema, Crime and Politics on the Witwatersrand* (1990:757) states that Panic's eventual retaliation to the state police and the idea of whiteness serves as a "powerful political statement (which) if it is not understood, the whole content of *Mapantsula* will be lost". Whether he throws a brick through a white madam's house; refuses to speak to the state police in Afrikaans even though he knows it; eventually challenges the polices' threats in the very language he claimed not to know; accompanies his landlady to a protest march; refuses to sign a statement that will incriminate a comrade (Duma) in terrorists activities - all speak to the protagonist's politicization. Panic's last statement in the film is "no". Considering the fact that the film was produced within the apartheid context, Panic's refusal to comply with the state police is not just contained within the film but resonates with the spectator who is him/herself oppressed by the state. The film therefore extends into real life experiences as

spectators are confronted with images that are politically loaded in a politically charged environment.

Conversely, Tsotsi's (Hood, 2005) protagonist (David- commonly referred to as Tsotsi) "seek[s]10 no external justification for [his]11 indiscriminate and arbitrary killing of innocent and mostly unarmed victims" (Rampa et al, 2001). At his nod, his victims are singled out, terrorized and in the case of his first victim, murdered. Although Gavin Hood attempts to redeem Tsotsi/David through the use of flashbacks (that show fragments of his unpleasant childhood) and the infant that he inherits and cares for, what remains palpable is the idea that the black man's point of departure is his natural delinquent self that needs atonement. The flashbacks are used to rationalize his aggressive and violent instinct. This act of rationalization assumes that by virtue of a black male being born into a trying situation, he will automatically resort to criminal activity. While the reality is that there are multiple black males born into similar conditions that then choose alternative and more progressive paths for themselves.

The film paints a bleak image of the black male that requires extreme external factors such as mistakenly inheriting an unwanted infant during a hijacking to humanize him. One wonders how a man who senselessly batters Boston (a long-standing member of his gang), bullies a disabled homeless man and shoots a woman who has just given birth, swiftly sympathizes with an unknown infant to a point of surrender. This transformation is difficult to accept especially when the question of the perpetrator's decency is echoed throughout the film. This question becomes a motif that interrogates the black man's morality and civility. When Tsotsi/David is confronted with a defenseless infant, the viewer's fears of his apparent inhumane tendencies are continuously played on until Tsotsi/David's redemption. The final act of raising his hands in the air annihilates the supposed inherent danger that black males are perceived to represent. It is against this backdrop that one wonders why the black male is deliberately imprisoned within this tsotsi/gangster trope that he is expected to struggle against. It is almost as if the black man's struggle is not external but himself. He has to grapple with his dark, savage self in order to be easily assimilable in contemporary/civilised society.

Lindiwe Dovey locates David's acts of violence and criminality within the context of a democratic South Africa. *The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act, No. 108 of 1996* promises that South Africa will "improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person" (1996:1243) and yet the country remains marred by socioeconomic inequality, unemployment and poverty. The emergence of the ubiquitous black bourgeoisie that is notorious for conspicuous consumption and corruption emphasizes the vast disparities and tensions that exist between the rich and the poor. In this case, the *tsotsi* figure as a member of the underprivileged class has to negotiate himself within a democratic state whose 'rainbow nation' dream he clearly has no access to. He is forced to live in an environment that is dominated by corrugated iron houses and dusty streets because of the lack of economic power.

Furthermore, Dovey (2007: 154) states that South Africa's apartheid past, which normalized violence through racially oppressive laws, plays a crucial role in the prevalence of contemporary violence in South Africa. Violence in the apartheid context was institutionalized as it was entrenched in South Africa's governing law systems. Dovey (2007) states that "the violent South African past has been integrated into, and is largely responsible for South Africa's violent present". Dovey's statement suggests that the *tsotsi* figure that is the embodiment of South Africa's contemporary violence is a byproduct of South Africa's brutal past which he has internalized and performs in an attempt to be assimilated into the new "egalitarian" present.

However, the idea that Dovey herself does not question why there is a growing fascination with the criminality and violence of young black males is of concern. This paper does not at all deny that there are indeed individual manifestations of violence and criminality in contemporary South Africa but the idea that this criminal and violent voice becomes racialised, privileged, and dominant over more complex and alternative nonviolent and peaceful voices of young black masculinities is problematic.

This idea of privileging one dominant narrative over others is best captured by Nigerian fiction novel writer, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. In her talk titled *The Danger of a Single Story* (2009) she states, "a single story creates stereotypes and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story the only story". Adichie (2009)

goes on to acknowledge the reality of the African continent's catastrophic wars and violence. However she maintains that

> There are other stories that are not about catastrophe and it is very important, it is just as important to talk about them. I have always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all the stories of that place or that person.

Adichie's idea that stories or narratives are embedded with power relations is critical in that it acknowledges the influence storytellers (i.e. filmmakers) have in constructing how a people/place is perceived. Adichie compares storytelling to the world of politics and economics. She affirms,

> Like economic and political worlds, stories too are defined by the principle of *Nkali*[8]. How they are told, who tells them, when they are told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power.

Richard Dyer reiterates this notion of power and representation in his chapter titled "The Role of Stereotypes" in *The Matter of Images- Essays on Representations* (1996:11). He refers to the dominant practice of utilizing stereotypes as a system of representation to demonstrate the power that lies in narrative construction. Dyer states that stereotypes are "an ordering process" which is a reflection of power relations in society. Dyer (1996:11) affirms the imbalance in power when it comes to representation as he asserts that,

> The prestige of high culture, the centralization of mass cultural production, the literal poverty of marginal cultural production…are aspects of power relations of representation on the side of the rich, the white, the male, the heterosexual.

The popularity of South African gangster films such as *Jerusalema* (Ziman R, 2008), *Hijack Stories* (Schmitz O, 2000),*Tsotsi* (Hood G, 2005) and *How to Steal 2 Million* (Mvundla, 2011), which are all directed by males (white and black) continuously function to privilege and advance the idea of violent and criminal heterosexual black masculinities. This is problematic in that

[8] Adichie states that this is an *Igbo* term that loosely translates as "to be greater than another" (2010)

these representations of black masculinities are 'incomplete' (as Adichie would say). Surely, there are also alternative narratives of young black males who identify with more peaceful and harmonious values that allow them to re-imagine and express their masculinities in more complex and progressive ways.

The idea of stereotypes is a complex one and it is evident in Richard Dyer and Homi Bhabha's texts why stereotypes continue to thrive in popular media. Their elaborations make the power dynamics visibly clear in representational practices. Homi Bhabha in *The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse* (1983:18) contextualises the notion of stereotypes within a colonial framework. He states that colonial discourse relies on the notion of "fixity" which normalizes the "ideological construction of otherness". He defines fixity as "a sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism" (1983:18). In other words, the process of 'othering' or marking another's 'difference' is a fundamental component of colonial discourse where the 'Other' becomes an aberration or an articulation of peculiarity, which fails to function within the framework of normality.

Bhabha states that colonial discourse is an "apparatus of power" (1983:23) whose core function is to identify with racial/historical/historical difference while rejecting it. It is this paradoxical relationship that colonial discourse has with 'difference' that makes it powerful. Bhabha uses the term "ambivalence" to describe this paradoxical relationship. He claims that the "ambivalence" of colonial discourse is what gives it authority. He refers to the notion of the colonial stereotype to demonstrate how the process of ambivalence functions within colonial discourse. Bhabha (1983:18) claims that "the force of ambivalence" is a key feature that facilitates the prevalence of the colonial stereotype.

A stereotype is defined as "a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated" (Bhabha, 1983:18). Therefore, the colonial stereotype constructs a knowledge system in which particular conceptions about the 'othered' are identified as somewhat true and are authenticated through the process of iteration. This means that the idea of "what is always in place" is embedded in the

representation of the colonial stereotype. The notion of "what is always in place" speaks to what Bhabha refers to as "probabilistic truth" (1983:18), which is always assumed in the continuous re-production of colonial stereotypes. He states that a core characteristic of the colonial stereotype is its use of excess, which exceeds empirical proof or logic.

Bhabha (1983:18) cautions against approaching the notion of stereotypes from a moralistic stance, which identifies them using the binary approach of good or bad, negative or positive. He emphasizes the importance of the "processes of subjectification" (1983:18), which is a result of stereotypical discourse. Bhabha maintains that judging a stereotype as either good or bad, or positive or negative means that the stereotype has been dismissed instead of being displaced. He sees the process of dismissing a stereotype as either positive or negative as limiting in that it does not allow one the opportunity to understand its "repertoire of positions of power and resistance, domination and dependence that constructs the colonial subject (both coloniser and colonised)" (Bhabha, 1983:19). This means that the notion of the colonial stereotype is understood as a dynamic device that constructs meaning and knowledge through the exercise of power and resistance, as well as domination and dependence. Bhabha's conception of stereotypes as more than just positive or negative representations corresponds with Richard Dyer's approach to stereotypes.

In the chapter *The Role of Stereotypes* (1996:11), Dyer refers to Walter Lippmann who coined the term 'stereotype'. Dyer states that Lippmann intended for the term to mean more than the negative (1996:11). According to Dyer, Lippmann's view is that stereotypes are valuable, necessary and contain limitations and ideological effects (1996:11). The necessity and value of stereotypes lie in the idea that they are "an ordering process" and a "short cut" that facilitates the articulation of society's values and beliefs through their representation of 'the world' (Dyer, 1996:11). Dyer emphasizes that the idea of who defines and is in control of stereotypes, which are "an aspect of human thought and representation", is more significant than the idea that they are wrong (1996:12). Furthermore, he claims that it is important to consider the purposes for which stereotypes are created (Dyer, 1996:12).

Dyer (1996:12) states that the stereotype functions as a "form of ordering" which organizes information that relates to how particular people are represented and classified. In this case, the represented or stereotyped society is identified through "generalities, patternings and typifications" (Dyer, 1996:12). Dyer is critical of the notion of the stereotype as "an ordering process" as it assumes what has been "ordered" by the stereotype as a complete fixed reality devoid of malleability, relativity, limitation and bias (1996:12). The idea of the absolute as applied to the notion of stereotypes highlights the significant potential that the representation of stereotypes has in perpetuating and authenticating particular ideas about the represented social group through the use of "generalities, patternings and typifications" (Dyer, 1996:12).

bell hooks (1992:89) interrogates the idea of black malehood(s) as constructed and ultimately normalized through colonial representations. She recalls her experience as a student in a predominantly white college where theory on black masculinities constructed a homogenous view of black males. According to hooks, black males are conceptualized through white supremacist capitalist patriarchal discourse as "psychologically 'fucked up', dangerous, violent, sex maniacs whose insanity is informed by their inability to fulfill their phallocentric masculine destiny" (2004:89). hooks argues that these assumptions on black malehood(s) are evidently one-dimensional generalities or typifications that fail to acknowledge the complexity of the black male experience by "erasing the realities of black men who have diverse understandings of masculinity" (2004:89). hooks' call to represent a more diverse black male experience is crucial and it is against this backdrop that young black male poets from Johannesburg, South Africa attempt to re-imagine more peaceful and harmonious conceptions of themselves. Their work aims to represent black male experiences that contradict stereotypical representations of violent, senseless, unemotional, uncaring, sex-crazed, untrustworthy and criminal black masculinities.

Performance Poetry as Counter Narratives of Resistance

The aim of this chapter is to understand what constitutes spoken word poetry as a narrative form. I focus on spoken word poetry's structural and thematic elements. I utilise Susan Somers-Willet's *Slam Poetry and the Cultural Politics of Performing Identity* (2005) as a primary text that thoroughly explains the subgenres of spoken word poetry.

According to Somers-Willet (2005:52) spoken word poetry is a vehicle where the "performance of identity and identity politics" can take place. Spoken word poetry allows each poet to construct an individual and subjective articulation of himself by assuming a specific performance style, subject matter and tone. With the exception of one poet who is a solo act, the rest of the poets involved in this study are from various collectives that play an active role in contributing to the growth of the spoken word poetry scene in Johannesburg. This study consists of three selected poets. Richard 'Quaz' Roodt is from Likwid Tongue, Donald 'Neosapien' Mokgale is a solo act and Mutle Mothibe is from Inaudible Poetry.

The spoken word poetry genre encompasses various sub-genres (i.e. slam poetry, performance poetry and hip-hop poetry). The poets in this study participate within the slam and performance poetry sub-genres. However, one poet (i.e. Richard 'Quaz' Roodt) has insisted that he no longer identifies himself as a performance poet but a writer. According to Roodt, the act of performance poetry privileges performance over the written component. He proposes that the text carries its own meaning which he feels should be constructed by the reader without the influence of performance. In consideration of Roodt's issue with the term 'performance poet', this paper recognises him as a writer/poet.

According to Somers-Willet, the distinctive element between slam and performance poetry is that slam poetry has a competitive element. In the context of slam poetry, the performance is timed and there is often a prize up for grabs after the audience determines who the winner is (Somers-Willet 2005:52). In performance poetry, the poets perform their work for a receptive audience without the pressures of the competitive element. Each poet uses multiple platforms to

exhibit his work. Each poet and his work will be introduced and discussed in subsequent sections of this paper.

Johannesburg is a constant companion in the lives of the poets. The poets experience the city space as a site that facilitates the re-conceptualization of black masculinities through the use of (performance) poetry. Johannesburg in this case becomes a space that allows for new and innovative identities to form. Popular media and mainstream cinema stereotypically marks the city of Johannesburg as a space that is dangerous, corrupt and engenders unlawful and immoral black masculinities. According to Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nutall (2008:12) in *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis* the dominant idea of Johannesburg as an unconstructive space that represents criminality, scarcity and exploitation is problematic as it dismisses the complexity of the urban space, which can also be experienced as "a site of fantasy, desire and imagination".

Mbembe and Nutall's view of the city corresponds with how the poets perceive the Johannesburg city space as a vehicle through which their aspirations and dreams can be fulfilled. These poets mimic the long-standing migration practices of miners from the rural areas to the "City of Gold" in search of economic success. The poets themselves 'migrate' from their respective suburban, rural or township homes into the inner city not only to construct new and innovative identities but also to find viable means to support themselves economically. (Performance) poetry in this case becomes a medium through which they can realize their professional aspirations. Additionally, Johannesburg plays a major role in offering a platform for these poets to express their counter narratives of resistance.

The notion of representation is particularly crucial to this study because the aim of this paper is not to address the young black poets' actual day-to-day practices of masculinities but to focus on the performative and representational ideas of masculinities via [performance] poetry. [Performance] poetry in this case is utilized as a tool to address the notion of violent, uncaring, oversexed and criminalized black masculinities.

Spoken word poetry as a whole is a lyrical and performative form whose popularity is not exclusive to the urban centres of the United States of America but extends to global urban

spectators. The growing interest in spoken word poetry is evident in Johannesburg as young spectators engage with this form regularly. According to Susan Somers-Willet (2005: 51), spoken word poetry sessions are traditionally performed in bars, coffeehouses, universities and theatres. This trend is also apparent in Johannesburg's spoken word poetry sessions. The following are a few examples of spoken word poetry sessions that young urban audiences/spectators attend at various Johannesburg venues: the Cramers coffeehouse poetry sessions; the KPN Tewop poetry sessions; the "A Lover and Another" Drama for Life slam poetry competition; the Word 'n Sound poetry sessions and the recurring 21 Poets and a Poem theatre show.

The popularity of spoken word poetry in Johannesburg is apparent, as this art form is readily available to young urban spectators through multiple platforms. According to Somers-Willet (2005:51), the popularization of spoken word poetry encourages the emergence of unique forms of writing, tone, performance style and themes. This fact is evident in the distinctive styles (discussed in analysis of poetry on pages 34-44). that Johannesburg poets have adopted

Although Somers-Willet refers specifically to slam poetry, much of this subgenre's components reflect the spoken word genre as a whole. Somers-Willet (2005:52) states that because spoken word poetry is a tool through which each poet performs identity, the idea of how this identity is performed is important. In other words, the poet's identity is not just embodied in the poet's words but also in the poet's gestures, voice, costume and mode of address (discussed in analysis of poetry on pages 34-44).

Furthermore, "homophonic[9] word play, repetition, singing, call and response, and rhyme" (Somers-Willet 2005: ibid) are common tools used by poets as part of their performances. Somers-Willet (2005: ibid) states that the performance of a poem is an essential aspect of spoken

[9] A homophone is defined as "a word that is pronounced like another word but has a different spelling or meaning, for example *some, sum*" (Hornby A. ,S., 2005:717) in *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary- International Student's Edition*

word poetry that influences how an audience will receive a poem. She claims that spoken word poetry borrows elements from performance art and the dramatic/comedic monologue in that it engages with similar identity politics as these art forms (2005: ibid). What sets slam poetry apart from these performance modes is slam poetry's competitive element. Slam poetry unlike other forms of spoken word poetry (i.e. performance poetry and hip-hop poetry) is performed within a time limit, against other poets who are also competing for a cash prize in front of a judging audience (Somers-Willet 2005: ibid).

As all the poets participating in this study engage with the slam poetry subgenre in the Johannesburg area and the rest of the country, they often find themselves competing against each other. Slam poetry in this case becomes a vehicle through which each poet asserts himself or his performed identity through his writing, tone, performance style and the themes that he explores in order to win the audience's favour. This means that the audience rewards the winning poet on the basis that they identify with the poet's identity politics.

According to Somers-Willet (2005:53), in order for a poem to be a success in the eyes of an audience, the poet needs to create a sense of 'realness' or authenticity that affects the audience's consciousness. She states that elements such as a first person address, which is a commonly used device in spoken word poetry, creates the idea that the piece being performed is more authentic or 'real' (Somers-Willet 2005:53). This sense of 'realness' gives the poet more sincerity and suggests that the poem being performed is a reflection of the poet-performer (Somers-Willet 2005:ibid). The participating Johannesburg poets use the first person address to create the idea that they are sharing genuine feelings and thoughts. The use of the first person singular "I" personalizes each poem by creating a subjective voice that conveys the idea that the poem is a reflection of the poet's identity.

Somers-Willet (2005:54) claims that a poet's performance of identity is often assigned the idea of 'authenticity' when s/he represents marginalized identities through his or her poetry. This

means that the audience is more responsive to poetry that speaks about sexual, class, gender, racial identities that are deemed marginal (Somers-Willet 2005:54). For example, the audience perceives poetry that explores issues of blackness, homosexuality, socioeconomic struggle, feminism or marginalized masculinities as socially relevant. Somers-Willet suggests that some spectators identify spoken word poetry as a political event rather than just a performative or literary mode (2005: ibid).

She questions why the notion of authenticity is assigned to the performance of marginalized identities in spoken word poetry and maintains that the answer lies in understanding that there are "specific performative expressions of identity at poetry slams as well as the larger cultural politics of identity that influence slam reception" (Somers-Willet 2005: ibid) or spoken word poetry as a whole. Somers-Willet (2005: ibid) observes that through the consideration of the aforementioned factors that influence the association of the performance of marginalized identities with authenticity, one understands that the idea of authentic identities is not only embodied but it is also constructed through spoken word poetry via the poet's performance of particular desires.

The idea of authenticity in relation to identity implies genuineness and substance of the performer. Somers-Willet (2005: ibid) states that the idea of authenticity suggests that "one's 'authentic self' is original, unique, true, existing before and outside of discourse" and therefore confirming the legitimacy of the performance as somewhat 'real' or reflective of the performer's true self. Somers-Willet (2005: ibid) emphasizes the importance of realizing the constructedness of the performed 'authentic identity' in spoken word poetry. She states that the audience plays a crucial role in constructing the poet's performed identity through the act of endorsing or rejecting it (2005:55). The audience in this case privileges some performed identities over others.

Somers-Willet problematises the idea of the 'authentic self' by linking the notion of performance and identity construction through Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of the Everyday Self*

(1959) and Judith Butler's *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993). Through these articles, Somers-Willet (2005:54) makes the observation that the idea of an "authentic self" is a construction since as any expression of identity is performative. This means that the idea of the self is a social construction, which is either accepted or rejected by a 'spectator'. She states, "selfhood is constituted by how a performance identity is received or judged by others" (2005:55). This means that the spectator or audience member plays an active role in the identity construction process of the performer. The audience's identification with a performer's projected "authentic self" and the spectator's experience of a "change of consciousness" (Damon M. in Somers-Willet 2005:54) affirms that performance is a significantly crucial element in any form of spoken word poetry.

Richard Dyer emphasizes that as much as spectators may construct their own meaning, he is not proposing that spectators can create whatever meaning they desire because "we are all restricted by both the viewing and the reading codes to which we have access (by virtue of where we are situated in the world and the social order)" (1993:2). This means that our own personal experiences and cultural capital limit how we respond to certain images presented to us through various mediums and each medium has its own codes and conventions that influence how meaning is to be constructed.

Since spoken word poetry is a performative medium through which identities are constructed and validated, it becomes important to understand how the notions of performance and performativity function as culturally political elements that facilitate the audience/spectators' identification with a performed identity as 'authentic'. According to Somers-Willet (2005:55), the idea of performance has by many scholars been defined in terms of its instantaneous theatrical nature, which either realizes or confronts identity. Performativity on the other hand is defined as a discursive process that demonstrates how the construction of an identity is established. In using the notion of performativity, one understands that a performance is not confined to the theatrical; rather it is a dynamic process where identity is constructed, validated or confronted through the audience/spectator's production of meaning.

In considering Judith Butler's discussion on performativity, Somers-Willet defines performativity as "the discursive citation of normative behaviour" (2005:55). Somers-Willet's definition suggests that spoken word poetry as a performative form, normalizes the performance of certain identities (i.e. race, class, gender, sexuality) which is partial to each performer's views and experiences. She states that the normalization of a performed identity is a process that occurs through the device of iteration, which is itself convincingly concealed and thereby "making (it) both novel and law" (Somers-Willet S, 2005: ibid). The link between the construction of normativity and performativity is crucial because it emphasizes representation's key role in normalizing certain ideas and behaviours. Performance in relation to the performativity of an identity is according to Somers-Willet (2005:56),

> A live embodiment and enactment of an identity in a particular space and time. As discursive practice, performativity is both prior to and as a result of any embodied performance: performativity is that normative behaviour to which a performance alludes to or parodies, and it is also a performance's effect in that the normative behaviour reflected in a performance is disseminated and eventually incorporated into that behaviour's performance history.

In the case of spoken word poetry for instance, poetry as a vehicle for the performativity of black masculinities constructs norms for how black masculinities should function. The poet's words, gestures, voice and subject matter become a personification of specific performed ideas of black masculinities, which become normalized and ultimately become integrated into the history of the performance of black masculinities. Therefore, since the poetry written and performed by the participating Johannesburg poets serves to offer counter narratives of resistance to dominant conceptions of black masculinities, their counter narratives become normalized, authenticated and assimilated into the history of the performance of black masculinities in Johannesburg's poetry circles. And the implication of this process of normalisation is that the poets' narratives eventually form part of the dominant discourse on black maleness.

An Analysis of the Poets' Work

Below is each poet's biography and work, which is accompanied by an analysis on how each poem plays a crucial role in destabilizing and interrogating mainstream cinema's normative ideas of young black masculinities.

Richard 'Quaz' Roodt

Richard "Quaz" Roodt is from Potchefstroom in the North West Province. He identifies himself as a writer, poet/emcee, community organiser and a creative activist. He is part of Likwid Tongue, a Jo'burg based poetry and performance collective. He teaches creative writing at the University of Johannesburg and he is the former after school Programme Director at Keleketla! Media Arts Project. He has been actively involved in the underground poetry and hip-hop scene as a host, performer, organiser and facilitator for twelve years. He has written and published *The Orange Book Volume 1* (2005) and *The Orange Book Volume 2* (2009). He has also released an E.P. titled *Your Slice of Cake* (2010) and two mixtapes titled *The Immaculate Thoughts of Za`uQ* (2007) and *The Chocolate Brown Guy* (2008). In 2010 he featured on Projectah`s debut album *College in Bars* and on J'Pusher's freestyle album. His writing has appeared in numerous anthologies, newspapers, websites, radio and television advertisements. He has facilitated writing workshops for Ex-Apartheid Combatants for The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR).

Donald 'The Neosapien' Mokgale

Donald "Neosapien" Mokgale is from Brakpan in the Gauteng province. The pseudonym Neo-Sapien is indicative of his radical nature. According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, "Neo" is a combining form that means "new" or "in a later form" (Hornby, 2005: 982) and the term "sapien" stems from "homosapien" which is defined as "the kind of species of human existing now" (2005:717). Neosapien's pseudonym is revolutionary because it counters the idea of being homo (i.e. the same). Neosapien's pseudonym serves as a vehicle through which the notion of the homogeneity of young black masculinities within dominant discourse in post-apartheid South Africa is challenged.

Neosapien's work is published in Mpho Khosi's anthology titled *Portraits of Propaganda* (2006). He has performed at the "Freshly Sliced" poetry sessions, "House of Hunger" poetry slam, AFDA, "Voices of Poetry" slam and the Jozi Book Fair. In 2010, he won of the "House of Hunger" poetry slam (in Johannesburg) and the "Voices of Poetry" slam. In the same year, he was a second runner up in the "Urban Soul" poetry slam. He defines his performance style as " pun-chy" and thought provoking, it comprises of social commentary and his life experiences all embellished with riveting figures of speech and uncanny wit" (Mokgale, 2011). Neosapien considers himself a professional spoken word poet whose work is not reserved exclusively for the stage but is also performed at corporate events, gala dinners, birthdays and office parties. Similar to Quaz, Neosapien is a hip-hop emcee.

Mutle Mothibe

Mutle Mothibe is an international spoken word artist, workshop facilitator and actor from the Vaal in the Gauteng province. He is part of a spoken word collective called Brake Sessions. It consists of Ellipsis Thabo Manoto and Rennie Alexander. They jointly produced and directed a spoken word poetry play titled *Estar*, which had a successful run at the Mandela Theatre in Johannesburg.

In 2011, Mothibe produced an acclaimed audio-visual, one-man, poetry show titled *Parkinson's*. He has performed at various Word N Sound poetry shows. In addition, in 2013, he released a 16-track debut solo album titled *In_sense.* In the same year, he was selected by the British Council to represent South Africa at the "Take Over Cardiff" festival in Cardiff, Wales. During his visit, he not only facilitated the production of a children's show, which was performed at the Cardiff Museum; but he also performed alongside Martin Daws who is the Young Poets Laureate of Wales. Subsequent to his success at the "Take Over Cardiff" festival, Mothibe was invited as a guest performer at the Apollo Theatre in New York.

Richard 'Quaz' Roodt

Seven Poems

The wind in my hair
My father's fingers and guitar strings
The red stoep, the drunk audience
Summer turns into autumn
The rustling of dry leaves

The sadness in my mothers voice
Tears that we both swim in
An old poem with a new pen
Forgive me ma, that is all I have

Copper cents in my pocket
A rusty rainbow when the sun sets
In a deep trance, bushman dance
with a hand full of sunflower seeds

A candle for my sister
Caged in today with dreams of yesterday
My soul whispers
but my weak body refuses to listen

I'm a good spirit, hungry flesh
A book to read, I want to be better
27 times around the sun, still a child

The future calls
The writer is searching hard
For himself and words for empty pages in his lifebook

Summer night candle light
The wrinkles in my grandmothers face
become words for a honest song and a new poem.

Roodt's poem is recited in Afrikaans and translated into English. The original title is *Sewe Gedigte*. Through this melancholic poem, Roodt invites the reader to share in his sorrow as he recalls an actual tragic event, which resulted in the loss of the life of his sister. In this poem Roodt creates a sense of intimacy as he publicly shares a private moment of vulnerability. He uses a first person address which, according to Somers-Willet (2005:53), offers a subjective

stance that establishes a confessional moment between the poet and the reader. Roodt's use of the confessional mode represents his fearlessness to open himself up to the reader. His poetry creates imagery that defiantly highlights his emotional turmoil as he grapples with the reality of his and his family's loss.

Roodt's defies popular media and mainstream cinema's construct of the macho and emotionally detached male, which according to bell hooks in *The Coolness of Being Real* (2004:148), is commonly promoted in gangsta rap. She states that gangsta rap "invites black males to adopt a cool pose, to front and fake it, to mask true feelings" (hooks b, 2004:148). Roodt's poignant tone suggests that he is unafraid to display his emotions and thereby subverting what bell hooks refers to as a patriarchal conception of a 'real man'. According to hooks (2004:149), a 'real man' should dissociate himself from his true feelings. Therefore, Roodt's poetry destabilizes patriarchal ideals of black masculinities as conceived in gangsta rap.

Although hooks in *The Coolness of Being Real* (2004) juxtaposes gangsta rap with the blues genre which she states serves as a platform for black males to express their emotional complexity, her observations on the blues are also applicable to [performance] poetry as it is clear that this art form can allow black males to articulate their emotions. hooks places great importance on the lyricism of the blues as a significant device through which black males confront the patriarchal notion of the impassive black man. Similar to the blues, lyricism is a fundamental component in poetry and acts as a conduit through which patriarchal notions of black malehood are confronted.

This poem is not only an ode to a long lost sister but it is also one in which the poet reveals a profound connection to his mother and father. His parents' presence is tangibly recalled through their respective corporeality. The poet refers to his father's fingers strumming a melancholic tune, which is associated with the loss of a daughter and sister. The poet also refers to a sense of comfort that his father offers him as he journeys through mourning. He refers to his mother's pensive voice and tears that signal sorrow that has metamorphosed into a river stream that overwhelms them collectively. He speaks of his desire to rewrite history (i.e. the loss of a sister

and other possible tragedies) and asks for forgiveness from his mother, as this seems to be an impossible task. His connection to womanhood in this poem is positive as it speaks of an idea black maleness that embraces rather than rejects and demeans womanhood. He paints a picture where he is unashamed of the intimacy that exists between himself, his sister and his mother.

He uses the “rusty rainbow” and “copper cents in (his) pocket” as metaphors for his state of scarcity in relation to wealth that transcends economics. The image of a “rusty rainbow” instead of one that is rich in vivid colours symbolises a bleak outlook in the event of his sister's loss. Additionally, the image of the “rusty rainbow” alludes to South Africa as a nation that is perhaps deficient or impaired in its effort to claim a glorious “rainbow” that is no longer so vibrant.

The poet draws on his coloured ancestry by referring to his Khoi-San roots that his sister has now supposedly become a part of in the spirit world. With this image in mind, one continues to hear the father's guitar strings as the poet connects the past and the present. The “bushman (that) dance(s) with a hand full of sunflower seeds” speaks of a future where the seeds planted during this mourning period will bear golden sunflowers that will signify a new hopeful beginning filled with healing.

He speaks of the present where he continues to commemorate his sister through the spiritual ritual of lighting a candle. He constructs a world in which he is still caught in past memories while he grapples with the reality of his present life. He draws a parallel between the physical and the spiritual as he states “my soul whispers but my weak body refuses to listen”. And with this statement he challenges traditional tenets of masculinity that do not allow for males to take on a vulnerable/ 'weak' position especially in relation to their 'virile' bodies. The manner in which he speaks about maleness is dynamic in that he acknowledges the multiplicity of one's identity. He seamlessly connects the body, soul and mind without privileging one over the other.

He equates himself to “a book to be read” and thus suggesting an openness to be deciphered and understood. He is unafraid to regard himself as “a child” in his search for knowledge unknown to him. The poet's use of childlikeness does not insinuate the assumed infantilism of black males, rather, the poet alludes to the idea that his knowledge of himself is limited just like a newborn. And with that he takes on an active role as a “writer... searching hard for himself and words for

empty pages in his life book". The candlelight is a motif in the poet's work. It symbolically shifts from signifying loss and memory and becomes indicative of a new era. One where there is an "honest song and a new poem". His poem ends on an affirmative note as he remembers his grandmother, another significant woman in his life who represents a more optimistic outlook. The mention of his grandmother at the end of the poem gives the reader a sense that there has been a critical matriarchal influence in his life. Through this poem, he manages to bridge the generational gap that exists between his ancestors, grandparent, parents and sibling. After reading this poem, the reader gets a sense that it is an ode to a generation beyond his immediate circle. This poem becomes an historical piece that documents the lives of the Roodts from a personal perspective. And with that he takes on an active role as a "writer... searching hard for himself and words for empty pages in his life book".

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Donald 'The Neosapien' Mokgale

The Sinless Cast the First Stone

Dodgy, scary, under privileged, up & coming…These are stones cast on me like spells from an archaeological witch, which by the way is a glitch in this matrix of life where I am the one. Everyone in society has taken the blue pill and attached themselves to the system of stereotypes where men are typified by types; can I not type my own DESTINY MAN?

See I've come to the city of gold to dig for my dreams, walked the city streets that paved the route to where Gill Marcus autographs paper for breadwinners to enter the race. So while I clutch to my goals and walk towards work, my sisters clutch to their bags and walk towards safety, a distance from me. "All it requires is time" they said, ironically when I ask for time from my sister she hides her cellphone and watch and watches her point B without giving me any of hers. See now it's about time that he that is without sin cast the 1st stone…

It's like I wrote a test called 'identity' and my examiner has failed me without checking the content, I bought clothes from IDENTITY and walked the streets of Jo'burg and still failed in the prospect, of successfully attracting ill-formed perceptions from the onset, I see no progress, so I'm 'ticked' off with a distinction for this nonsense, and so I give society an F for lacking the logic, to differentiate between me and my fellow brothers in different markets. One would think education is the answer right? I dare you to walk the streets of Sandton and behold the looks that get left on the pavements, you'd swear perceptions are sold in malls at a discount and everyone buys their share of the basics

What happened to the society where each man forged his own identity and was named after it? The Mthimkhulus, Nkosis and abakwa-Dlangamandla!! Those who walked boldly and society made way, today society talks boldly and we walk their way…
He that is without sin, cast the 1st stone…

Mokgale's poem constructs the idea that he is an individual who crafts his own identity and will not accept a homogenous view of who he is as a young black male. He suggests that societal labels that aim to restrain and control his identity have to be destabilized and subverted. In the poem he suggests that society has imprisoned black males within the "Dodgy, Scary, Underprivileged and Up and coming" categories. He interrogates these classifications as they confine black male identity to criminality or classist discourses that draw a dichotomy between the poverty-stricken black male and the rising/'extraordinary' black middle class/ "black diamond" male that in reality is not so fluidly integrated into white capitalist patriarchal

discourses. He defines these categories as “stones cast on (him) like spells from an archeological witch” and thus alluding to how burdensome it is to be allocated to these constricting generalizations that are hard to escape.

He equates the establishment of these divisions to sorcery and thereby emphasizes how malicious they are. He suggests that this practice of classification has a psychological, physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual effect on the black male. He uses the idea of the matrix to refer to society at large. This is a reference to the film *The Matrix* (1999, The Wachowski Brothers), which grappled with the issue of resisting constructed societal norms and values in order to find one's greatness (i.e. becoming the one). In fact, he refers to himself as THE ONE in the poem. He names society's system of categorization as stereotyping as he claims that everyone in society is intoxicated in acceptance of these norms and values. In his mission to probe and question the status quo, he asks “can I not type my own DESTINY MAN?” and this is also a play on the existence of South African men's magazine titled “Destiny Man” where Khanyi Dlomo the editor constructs the ideal South African “Destiny Man”.

The poet then refers to Johannesburg as “the city of gold” where he has come to “dig for (his) dreams”. Johannesburg is commonly known as the “city of gold” because it is not only South Africa's mining capital but it is also a place of job opportunities/economic growth. It is clear in the poet's statement that he is also referring to multitudes of black males that migrate from their homes (often based in provinces outside of Gauteng) to Johannesburg in order to provide for their families. He refers to the Johannesburg streets as the route through which Gill Marcus, the South African Reserve Bank governor “autographs paper for breadwinners to enter the race”. Through this the poet proposes that Johannesburg is the hub of South Africa's economic activity. He claims that this space is where breadwinners are created.

It is evident that the poet's view challenges the notion that Johannesburg is merely a perilous space infested by outlaws. He paints a scenario for the reader as he states “while I clutch to my goals and walk towards walk, my sisters clutch to their bags and walk towards safety”. Through the poet's plot, the reader is made aware that there is an interplay between race and gender when it comes to the black man. The poet invites the reader to begin examining why it is a societal

norm that black maleness is automatically perceived as a threat to womanhood. The idea of the stereotype of the violent and criminalized black male becomes particularly significant in this poem because the poem aims to confront the notion of "generalities, patternings and typifications" (Dyer, 1996:12) which are key devices that are utilized in the construction of stereotypes in order to promote the homogeneity of the 'othered' or in this case, black maleness.

Mutle Mothibe

The Mist

Caught up in Love's Rapture.
She was my very own Anita Baker.
On route to heart took a short cut past stomach with a dying need to bake her.
Muffins.
Flavoured...
Banana, split open she had her chest cavity for my emotional muffing.
Locked lip to lip we'd silently speak.
Heaven the destination and our feelings the compass.
We'd launch off from the highest of sensual peaks on a mission to touch God's soul.
We'd tickle his sole and the second he'd smile, we'd Come...
Plummeting back to the earth.
Peripheral vision blinded by bursting bubbles of light and sound.
We'd land soft on my futon.
The abstract Jazz tunes of Mr. Davis would welcome us back from our Miles per Nano seconds around a world unseen.
Blinded by Love my hand would make its way up past goose pimpled skin.
Braille writings for me to read.
My hand would its way Up to the Base...
Up to the Base of her neck to feel her pulse and a new life buzzing through her body.
My other hand would make its way Down to the base of her belly to feel a new life now growing inside her Temple.
It would just be our sun just chilling and Kick_in it, just chilling and Kick_in it.
But Oh snap!! Snap!!! Snap!
Back to reality
Their absence is like a dart board hard to miss.
But My sun can't be missed.
He rose to the occasion the day he was born.
Bright and brave he chases Apollo across the sky.
Rises in the east and in the west he sets alarm clocks for future appointments.

They both cannot be mist.
For they once in a while condense in the form of tears in corners of my eyes.
Turning windows of the soul to mirrors, mystified.
As I see through the sadness I live with in their absence and reflect on the happiness I used to feel.
When it was just the Phoenix, our Sun in her womb and I on a Lazy Sunday afternoons...
Just chilling and kick_in it
Just chilling and kick_in it
Just chilling and kick_in it

In this poem, Mothibe refers to the stereotype of conflicted relationships between women and men after childbirth. According to hooks (2004:115) in *Doing the Work of Love*, romantic relationships between black males and felames are stereotypically represented as negative and wrought with tension. Mothibe uses a retrospective device (i.e. past tense) to idealize the relationship he once had with his lover and his son. He states that his son and lover's absence "condense in the form of tears in corners of my eyes. Turning windows of the soul to mirrors, mystified" (Mothibe, 2011). Through this line he captures a sense of emptiness that comes with losing one's family. Mothibe is unafraid to represent the black male as emotionally vulnerable. This is significant since black males are commonly shown in mainstream cinema as emotionless.

However, Mothibe's poetry relies heavily on corporeality to speak to the black male experience. He claims to create a world where lovemaking is mystical. The line "we'd launch off from the highest of sensual peaks on a mission to touch God's soul. We'd tickle his sole and the second he'd smile, we'd Come…Plummeting back to the earth" attempts to represent an emotive and beyond-the-physical lovemaking encounter between a man and woman. But the woman in his poem is constructed as an anonymous body whose function it is to give birth and make love to. The reader never knows this woman beyond her "split open… chest cavity" (Mothibe, 2011). Phrases such as "emotional muffing" and "on route to heart took a short cut past stomach with a dying need to bake her" play on patriarchal views of women that conceive of them primarily as childbearers and sexual partners (to heterosexual men). The use of food imagery to describe women is also problematic in that it reinforces the idea that women are objects of male consumption. Furthermore, the poet's engagement with the notion of black malehood revolves around the phallic.

Mothibe anthropomorphizes the sun. The sun (being an essential life-giving force that affects the development of all living organisms) symbolises how the poet holds his son in high esteem. However, Mothibe's use of sexual undertones to refer to his sun/son is problematic. The line "he rose to the occasion the day he was born" has double meaning in that on the one hand it implies that the sun/son exceeds expectations and fulfills whatever responsibily he has, but on the other hand, it may be read as a sexual inuendo that suggests the "rising" of a phallus to accommodate a sexual occasion. The latter feeds into the myth of the inherent hypersexuality of black men. It implies that even in infancy, black boys have the ability to fulfill the stereotype of the overly sexualised black male.

Mothibe continuously uses puns to get his point across. He uses hip-hop vernacular to talk about the state of his son/sun in his mother's womb "just chilling and kick_in it". Mothibe's work is playful as it references one of hip-hop's famous lines "kickin' it" which translates to just relaxing or no stressing. He paints his son as demi-god who finds himself in the company of Apollo. According to Greek mythology "gods feared him (Apollo), and only his father and his mother, could easily endure his presence. Distance, death, terror, and awe were summed up in his symbolic bow; a gentler side of his nature, however, was shown in his other attribute, the lyre, which proclaimed the joy of communion with Olympus (the home of the gods) through music, poetry, and dance" (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2014). The poet constructs his son/sun as being on par with a revered god whose wrath is notorious. Mothibe assigns machismo and virility to his son/sun and at the same time, romanticizes his interaction with Apollo.

Mothibe's work is reflective of the contradictions that exist in society. Having analysed his poem, it is evident that the power of dominant narratives is overwhelming.

Rainbow's Men: Re-imagining Black Masculinities in Mainstream Cinema

Director's Concept

Rainbow's Men (Shange, 2014) is a 16 minute experimental documentary film that aims to demonstrate how performance poetry in Johannesburg offers a counter narrative of resistance that seeks re-imagine the notion of criminalized, hypersexualized and unemotional young black masculinities as constructed in South African mainstream cinema. The choice to use the experimental mode was motivated by my aim to privilege counter narratives and alternative voices over dominant ones. As a filmmaker, my aim was to echo the sentiments of the participating poets by confronting dominant approaches to mainstream cinema and popular media. What constitutes this documentary as experimental is its structure. It not only combines still photography with video images, but it also borrows elements from the music video genre through editing and the use of music.

The title 'Rainbow's Men' refers to the idea of the modern black man who is situated within what Arch Bishop Tutu coined as the 'rainbow nation' at the advent of South Africa's democratic dispensation. This film aims to reflect on the black male experience, which is alternative to popular media's dominant conception of what black males are about in contemporary South Africa.

Filmic Visual Style

Rainbow's Men (Shange, 2014) begins with a black background and a white text that states, "There's a Negro in there. If he touches me I'll slap him. You never know with them. He must have great big hands and is probably a brute" (see Appendix A). The inclusion of Frantz Fanon's quote conveys the reality of the fears and anxieties that surround the black male body. Additionally, Fanon's authority as a key scholar in black masculinities discourses, was needed in order to anchor the film's own observations within larger debates around black maleness.

My interest in the topic as a young black woman was sparked by my own anxieties around the black male figure. Before I moved from a suburb that is largely populated by white people (i.e.

Edenvale), I had irrational fears about the prospect of living in the city of Johannesburg. I feared this city because of how it was commonly represented in popular media as a crime-infested space where dubious black masculinities roamed the streets. After living on the infamous Bree Street for a period of two years, I am yet to encounter the overstated reality of criminalized black masculinities in the city.

What I have encountered more often than not are black masculinities that actively participate in ukuphanda, which loosely translates as 'hustling' (i.e. a practice of vigorously working towards a better livelihood). There is the self-employed man that sells fruits and vegetables at the city's market at affordable prices and respectfully calls you sisi (i.e. sister) instead of a sexist and objectifying 'baby' or mabhebeza (i.e. another term for 'baby'). There is the young musician who 'basks' with his guitar case open while he produces a soundscape for the city. There is the young corporate man who walks swiftly through the city's populated corridors to get to work on time or in the case of this film, there is the performance poet who has migrated from far off townships and rural areas to make a name for himself through spitting (i.e. reciting) his rhymes for the rest of us to hear. These are the men that my film is interested in.

What I have realized over time is that the reality of criminal behaviours in the city of Johannesburg is not necessarily specific to this space. The fact is crime happens all over the country, regardless of whether it is white suburbia, the township, the rural areas or the city. Crime in South Africa should not be racialized but it should be conceived as a practice that happens as a result of ill-informed choices that particular individuals (regardless of their race/creed) make.

Feelings of shame and disappointment with myself at my own practice of racial profiling prompted me to ask the question that I ask at the beginning of the film. I then continue to assign agency to each young black man in the film by allowing them time to speak for themselves instead of me speaking about my own experiences. I have discovered that there is power in not speaking of behalf of another (and indeed as a woman representing a male experience, I am engaging with the subject of 'difference' and I need to acknowledge that). The basis of this film

is to give a voice to the voiceless and in this case alternative black masculinities' narratives are not visible enough. Following is a brief introduction of the poets featured in the film:

The visual style of *Rainbow's Men* (Shange, 2014) is influenced by hip-hop's music videos and traditional documentary elements (i.e. interviews and use of text). The music video component is evident in each poet's performance. All the performances are accompanied by a specific soundtrack, which is inserted during post-production in order to avoid each poem sounding like a rap song. A young black male music student Reatile 'Ray Kola' Koka studying classical guitar at the University of Pretoria specifically composed the music for this film. The choice to use this young musician was based on the fact that he is also a producer of hip-hop music, which translated into the music having an eclectic mix of jazz and hip-hop. The idea of using music for each recital was to highlight the performativity of the film itself.

My aim from the beginning has been to challenge the notion of the 'objective truth' of documentary. The purpose of this film is to make the spectator aware that ideas of 'masculinity' and 'blackness' are themselves societal constructions, which are continuously performed. This film hopes to confirm Bill Nichols' idea that,

> Documentaries always were forms of re-presentation, never clear windows onto 'reality'; the filmmaker was always a participant-witness and an active fabricator of meaning. A cinematic discourse rather than a neutral or all-knowing reporter of the way things truly are (1988:49).

The view of the city through high angles, extreme close ups, close ups and mid-shots of the pipes, bolts, bridge lights, street signs, traffic lights and stickers on poles suggests a more intimate encounter with the city (see Appendix K-P). One would only experience some of the angles captured through the act of physically walking through the city, which is critical in having an experiential understanding of the term, the 'hustle and bustle' of Johannesburg.

The interviews are clearly constructed in that each background is carefully chosen to correspond with each poet's image and personality. Donald 'Neosapien' Mokgale has been placed in a serene floral park in the city where he is wearing a tie, a white shirt, a waistcoat, tailored trousers

and formal shoes. His image is chic and formal and the background was chosen to create a calmer ambience (see Appendix B). Although his personality off-screen is playful, on-screen he presents a calmer and more reflective self, which is in parallel with the chosen site. Mid-shots and close ups were mostly used for his interview in order to emphasize his humanity more than his corporeality.

Richard 'Quaz' Roodt's image on the other hand is more creative and expressive (see Appendix C). He dresses like a poet/emcee with an oversized button down collared shirt, a white t-shirt, a wooden beaded necklace, baggy jeans and Nike Air Force sneakers. He has striking long dreadlocks that he has loosely tied into an interesting looking hairstyle. His image corresponds perfectly with the colourful and vibrant background that has graffiti on it. His personality is also as playful and laid back as his environment. Roodt's interview is also shot using mostly mid-shots. Again this choice was made to privilege a non-corporeal idea of him.

Mutle Mothibe is quiet in nature and his dress code is simple with clean lines and dark colours (see Appendix D). The choice to place him on a rooftop of a skyscraper away from the 'hustle and bustle' of the city streets is intentional. The rooftop is silent enough to hear his soft-spoken voice but at the same time, one gets to see the cityscape. His interview is the only one, which is shot in black and white. The choice to shoot in black and white is purely for aesthetic reasons. His facial features appear stronger in black and white due to his dark Afro and his beard, which beautifully frames his face. The darkness of his mole next to his nose and the tattoo on his neck are highlighted even more in black and white. To me as a filmmaker, this is a beautiful image, which focuses not on Mutle Mothibe as a sexualized body but as a human face with interesting expressions, thoughts, a smile and a lot to say. The use of extreme close ups and close ups is also deliberate in that I want his emotive eyes and face to be the focus.

In relation to the performances, each poet is allocated a specific site in the city of Johannesburg that embodies his performative style. This site functions as a 'stage' of some sort. Donald 'Neosapien' Mokgale's performance is shot in Newtown Johannesburg. His background is a deep saturated red building with a black and white building number on it. This background was chosen because of the contrast between it and Mokgale's dress code. The performance was shot in harsh light that casts shadows on his eyes as a play on this idea of the criminalization of the

black male, a topic that Mokgale specifically focuses on in his poem and in his interview.

In this performance, a variety of shots are used depending on what he is saying at a specific moment in time. He addresses the camera directly at some moments in order to disrupt the viewer's distance from the text. He uses a direct gaze in order to confront and question. He points at the camera at times as he refers to his disgruntlement regarding society's conception of black masculinities. The editing is relatively rapid in order to get his performance from different angles. His gestures are key at particular moments and these are appropriately focused on. His performative style in this piece is provocative and subversive and I think that the choice to shoot him in the manner he was shot is appropriate for what he explores in his poem (see Appendix E-G).

During Richard 'Quaz' Roodt's recital, a loose narrative is constructed where a performer re-enacts private moments of writing and reflection (see appendix H). Close up shots are repeatedly used in order to create a sense of intimacy between the viewer and the writer. The writer's moments, which are filmed in the interior under low lighting, are juxtaposed with exterior and interior cutaways that act as visual metaphors to Roodt's writing. Roodt's voice during the performance acts as somewhat of a voice-over and an anchor while the music plays in the background. The choice to get a performer to play the role of the writer is influenced by the fact that Roodt no longer identifies himself as a performance poet and with that in mind, I thought it appropriate to create an imaginary narrative. The narrative is composed in such a way that it is harmonious and not conflicting with Roodt's recital. Additionally he recites in Afrikaans and because of that his performance would have to be accompanied by subtitles.

Despite Mutle Mothibe's soft-spoken nature, his performance style is bold and he is well known for using his body to embody the words that he recites. His use of elaborate gestures meant that the shots had to be wider in order to capture the detail in his movement. His performance was shot on a rooftop of a skyscraper with a skyline that features the recognizable Telkom tower in the background. The collection of satellites on one corner of the rooftop created an interesting commentary about Johannesburg's inhabitants.

Mothibe's performance was edited to capture the various motions that he expressed with his body. He was shot through varying shot sizes and angles to capture the diversity in his movements. Mothibe was shot in a softer light because of his topic. He explored the idea of lovemaking and fatherhood and because of that, I wanted a warm feel to his visuals. His performance has more of a music video feel to it because the images have a slight gloss to them. There was more motion in the shots in relation to Mothibe because of the nature of his performance. His movement was more fluid than Mokgale and so the motion of the camera made sense (see Appendix J-K).

Music is a key component in all the poets' performances. Each track was chosen according to whether it harmonized with the flow of the recited poem. The manner in which the city was shot in the title sequence and in-between some interviews was intentional. The use of black and white photography against a white background was an attempt to visually re-imagine the city of Johannesburg. For instance, the Mandela Bridge was not shot in its entirety because I wanted to offer a non-tourist/postcard view on the city itself. I chose to shoot the city in black and white in order to counter the 'postcard view' of the city, which is often captured in colour. The stills are rapidly edited in a triptych format in order to capture the lively energy of the space.

The view of the city through high angles, extreme close ups, close ups and mid-shots of the pipes, bolts, bridge lights, street signs, traffic lights and stickers on poles suggests a more intimate encounter with the city (see Appendix L-Q). One would only experience some of the angles captured through the act of physically walking through the city, which is critical in having an experiential understanding of the term, the 'hustle and bustle' of Johannesburg.

Jyoti Mistry in *Johannesburg: Vocabularies of the Visceral and Expressions of Multiple Practices* refers to the idea of the "visceral experience of…Johannesburg" (2010). She cites Michel de Certeau in 'Walking in the City' (1984) where she states that de Certeau "describes the importance of navigating the city on foot to fully understand its spatiality on an individual level" (2010).

Mistry's text personalizes the city space and thereby re-imagines it. In *Rainbow's Men* (Shange, 2014), the use of time lapse was also an attempt to capture the constant movement of the city

space. Time lapse allows one to condense the city's activities into short manageable clips that capture full experience. Moving images of the city were also inserted in order to refer to the city's constant vibrancy.

My aim was not only to reimagine the representation of black masculinities in mainstream cinema but it was also about re-conceptualizing Johannesburg as a space which has itself been constructed as hazardous, unlivable and a space that grooms deviant behaviours.

Conclusion

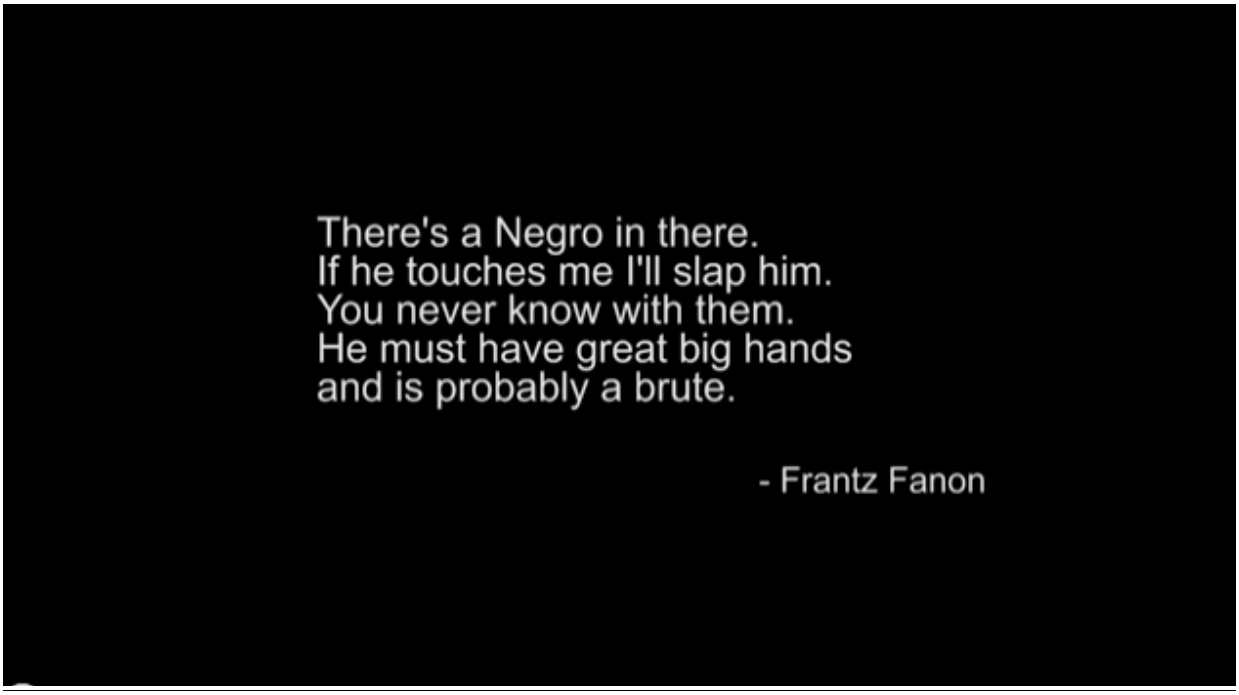
Subsequent to producing *Rainbow's Men* (Shange, 2014), I am convinced that more effort should be placed in centering the narratives of identities that have been historically marginalized in popular media. And in one centering these narratives, one should be aware of the power dynamics that are embedded in storytelling.

In producing this film, I realized that at times the poets were not as alternative or as progressive as I had initially expected them to be. Statements such as "it's gotten to a point where even black people are afraid of black men" (Mokgale in *Rainbow's Men*, 2013) means that the issue of womanhood is relegated to a universal idea of personhood while simultaneously designating a place of privilege to masculinities. It is important even in speech to acknowledge the existence of womanhood not in an effort to affirm the societal construction of gender binaries; rather it is about being cognizant of the existence of [hetero][10]patriarchy, which aims to continuously dismiss the materiality of problematic ideologies that insist on the inferiority of women. It is clear that racial politics continue to be privileged over gender politics.

This process has been insightful and has indeed served as a motivation for me to participate in more projects that focus on identitarian politics.

[10] Heteropatriarchy privileges heterosexual ideals of womanhood(s) and manhood(s).

Appendix A



Appendix B

Appendix C

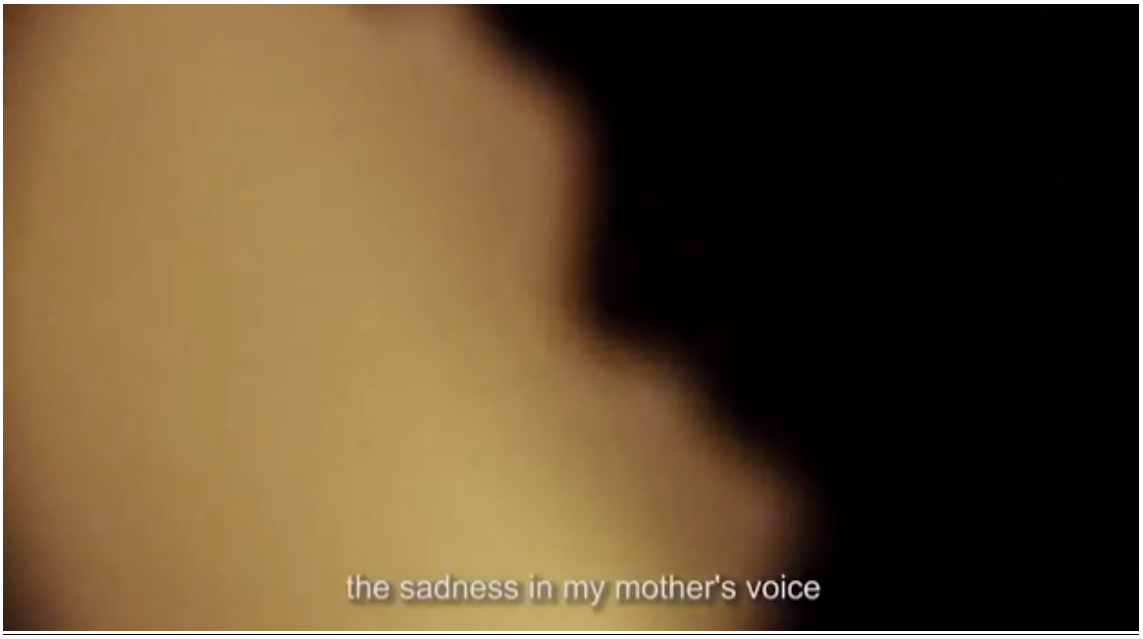
Appendix D

Appendix E

Appendix F

Appendix G

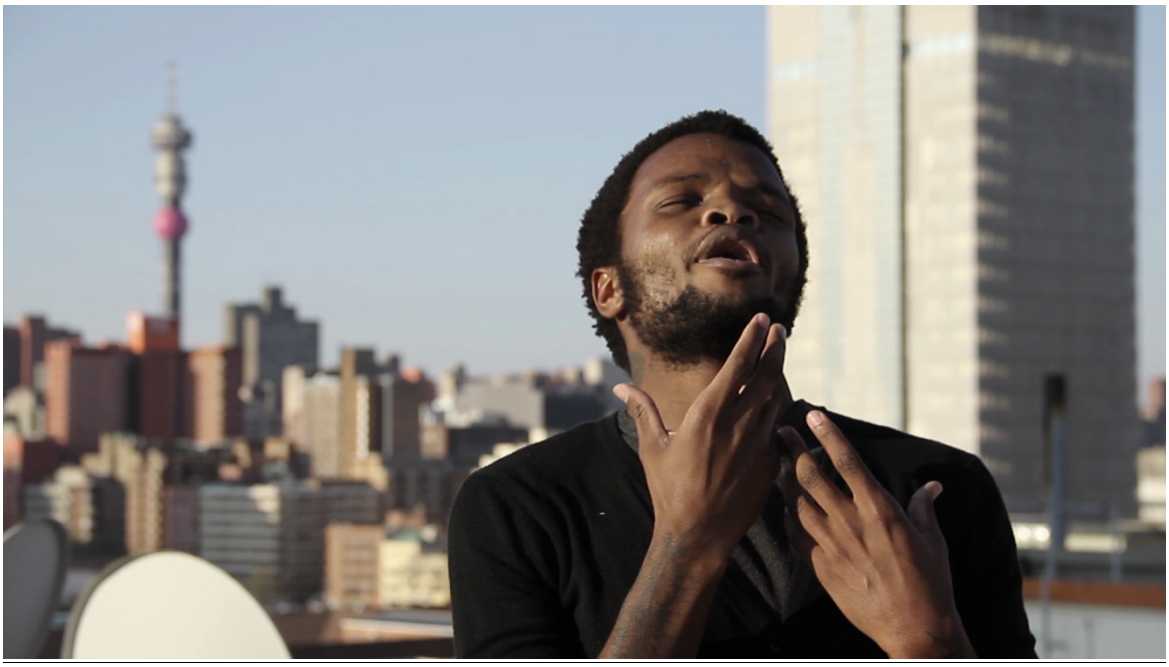
Appendix H



Appendix I

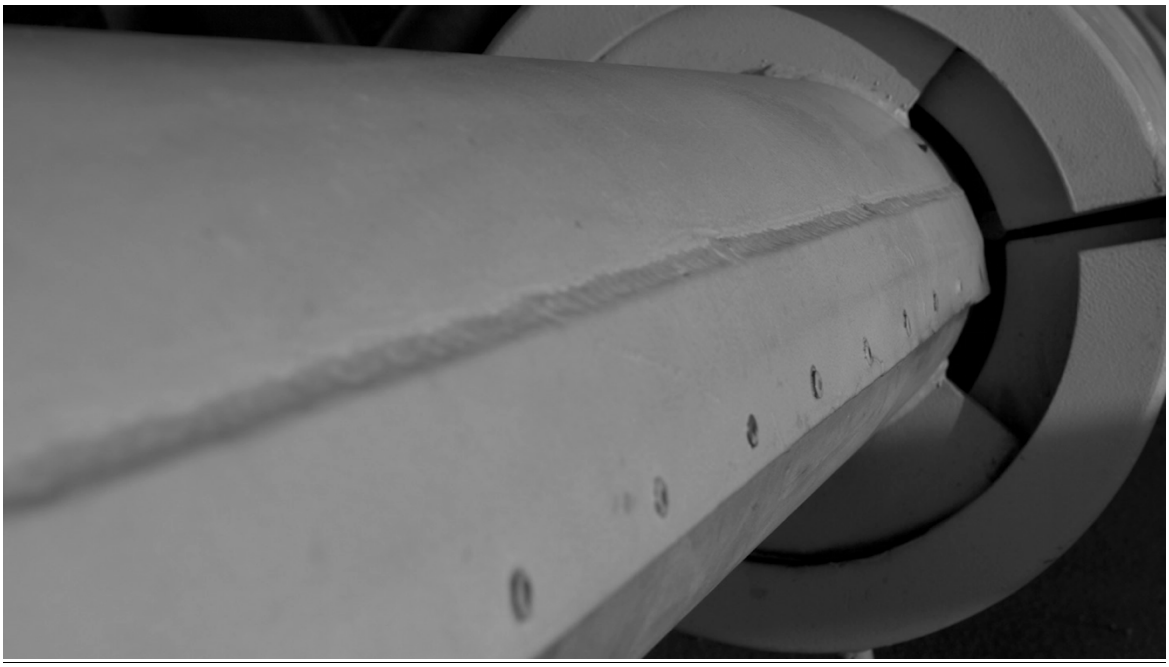
Appendix J

Appendix K



Appendix L

Appendix M



Appendix N

Appendix O

Appendix P

Appendix Q

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[11] Translated to English as "Seven Poems"