

**Imaginative acts of photographic self-representation as a critical response to
representations of the black male body in South African photography**

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Abstract

The first part of this thesis discusses some of the problematic photographic practices that form part of the modern visual discourse employed in defining the representation of the black man in South African photography. The aim of this thesis is to critically investigate the visual discourse in contemporary South African photography and to outline the inherent flaws whereby the black male subject is represented according to racial stereotypes inherited from the photographic conventions of colonial discourse. The purpose of this is to investigate my own photographic practice by drawing a critical comparison with the works of German photographer Gustav Theodor Fritsch (b.1834-1927), South African photographers Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin (b.1874-1954), the Caney brothers (1844-1899), Steve Hilton-Barber (b.1962-2002), Pieter Hugo (b.1976-), Zanele Muholi (b.1972-) and Zwelethu Mthethwa (b.1960-), and Nigerian-born British photographer Rotimi Fani-Kayode (b.1955-1989). My argument is centred around the discussion of these photographer's works and the visual impact on the manner in which the black subject is portrayed as a 'noble savage'. The predominant visual representation of the black body in South African photography perpetuates the kinds of discourse that rely on anthropological photographic methods of representation. I argue that where the depiction of the black male body is concerned, a number of contemporary South African photographers mentioned in this thesis continue to unconsciously appropriate a colonial discourse wherein the body of the black man is cast in the exotic role of 'noble savage' with extreme attributes regarding sex and gender, either as extremely 'effeminate' or, alternatively, as 'hyper-masculine' and exuding a 'raw' sexual prowess (Read, 1996:64). The work that I create and my photographic practices utilise some of the abovementioned artists' problematical visual devices in order to subvert them but also to create an alternate perception of black representation.

In the second chapter of this thesis, I critically evaluate the work of Rotimi Fani-Kayode as a strategy to employ alternate means of visual representation of the black body in order to critically re-evaluate the work of contemporary South African artists in their depiction of the black male body through either studio photography or documentary photography. The aim is to point out imaginative forms of representation as an alternative to either of the two modes of photography mentioned above. The argument then aims to put emphasis on acts of imaginative self-representation, a contemporary mode in photographic art practice made

popular by Rotimi Fani-Kayode. Imaginative self-representation involves “the ritualistic transformation of the colonial imagery into creations of our own” as black artists in order to subvert the dominant discourses on representations of the black body (Fani-Kayode, 1997:6). This is just one of the important strategies used by the artists mentioned in this thesis to critique black sexuality. My works and practices draw their influence from the discourses that dominate the contemporary discourse on the representation of the black body. My argument looks at stereotypical forms of photographic practice and critiques the problematical construct of such representations of black male sexuality. The purpose is to expose some of the Western principles that seek to regulate and control the black body. My own practice focuses on creating works of art that form part of my cultural and historical background. Sexuality and gender are discussed in the third part of this thesis as a means to outline my own photographic practice and its influences.

The third chapter investigates the masculinity of the black subject through a discussion of sexuality and gender performativity. In this chapter, gender proves to be a performative, unlike some of the essentialist assumptions made about how sexuality and gender are unchanging. A visual mechanism that seeks to critically question racist representations of black sexuality such as drag and performativity is applied in the construction of affirmative imagery of black masculinity. The final chapter of the thesis focuses on my own work as an example of imaginative forms of self-representation. The first, second and third parts of the argument serve to provide a theoretical framework in which to situate my own practice.

Opsomming

Hierdie tesis bespreek van die problematiese fotografiepraktyke wat deel uitmaak van die visuele diskoers waarvolgens die swart man in Suid-Afrikaanse fotografie uitgebeeld word. Die doel van die tesis is die kritiese ondersoek van die visuele diskoers in kontemporêre Suid-Afrikaanse fotografie, en die blootlegging van die inherente leemtes waarin die swart manlike subjek uitgebeeld word volgens rassestereotipes wat uit fotografie gebruik van die koloniale diskoers spruit. Die oogmerk is om my eie fotografiese praktyk te verken deur 'n kritiese vergelyking te tref met die werk van die Duitse fotograaf Gustav Theodor Fritsch (b.1834–1927); die Suid-Afrikaners Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin (b.1874-1954), die Caneybroers (1844-1899), Steve Hilton-Barber (b.1962-2002), Pieter Hugo(b.1976-), Zanele Muholi (b.1972-) en Zwelethu Mthethwa (b.1960-), en die Britse fotograaf Rotimi Fani-Kayode (1955-1989), 'n Nigeriër van geboorte.). My argument is gesentreer rondom die bespreking van hierdie fotograaf se werke en die visuele impak op die wyse waarop die swart onderwerp word uitgebeeld as 'n 'edel barbaar ". Die visuele voorstelling van die swart liggaam in Suid-Afrikaanse fotografie is hoofsaaklik 'n voortsetting van die soort diskoerse wat op antropologiese fotografiese uitbeeldingsmetodes berus. Ek voer aan dat, wat die uitbeelding van die swart manlike liggaam betref, 'n paar kontemporêre Suid-Afrikaanse fotografe wat in hierdie tesis ter sprake kom, steeds onbewustelik 'n koloniale diskoers handhaaf wat die eksotiese rol van 'edel barbaar' met uiterste geslags- en genderkenmerke – hetsy uiters 'vroulik' of 'hipermanlik' met 'n 'rou' seksuele manhaftigheid (Read, 1996:64) – aan die swart man toeken. In my eie werk en fotografiepraktyke het ek van bogenoemde kunstenaars se problematiese visuele middele gebruik gemaak, nie net om dit bloot te lê nie, maar ook om 'n alternatiewe opvatting van 'swart' uitbeelding te skep.

In die tweede hoofstuk van die tesis gebruik ek alternatiewe metodes om die swart liggaam visueel uit te beeld in 'n kritiese herbeoordeling van die werk van kontemporêre Suid-Afrikaanse kunstenaars wat die swart manlike liggaam deur hetsy ateljeefotografie of dokumentêre fotografie voorstel. Sodoende verskuif die klem na verbeeldingryke vorme van uitbeelding as alternatief vir bogenoemde twee vorme van fotografie. Daarná val die soeklig op handeling van verbeeldingryke selfvoorstelling – 'n kontemporêre metode in fotografiese kunspraktyk wat deur Rotimi Fani-Kayode gewild gemaak is. Verbeeldingryke selfvoorstelling behels “die rituele transformasie van koloniale beelde tot ons eie skeppings” as swart kunstenaars, ten einde die oorheersende diskoerse oor die uitbeelding van die swart

liggaam omver te werp (Fani-Kayode, 1997:6). Dít is bloot een van die belangrike strategieë wat die kunstenaars in hierdie tesis gebruik om op swart seksualiteit kritiek te lewer. My werk en praktyk word beïnvloed deur die oorheersende kontemporêre diskoerse oor die voorstelling van die swart liggaam. In my argument bestudeer ek stereotiepe vorme van fotografiese praktyk, en lewer ek kritiek op die problematiese konstruksie van sodanige voorstellings van swart manlike seksualiteit. Sodoende word sommige van die Westerse beginsels wat die swart liggaam wil reguleer en beheer aan die lig gebring. My eie praktyk konsentreer op die produksie van kunswerke wat deel uitmaak van my kulturele en historiese agtergrond.

Deel 3 van die tesis ondersoek seksualiteit en gender ten einde my eie fotografiepraktyk, én die faktore wat dit beïnvloed, te omskryf. Die derde hoofstuk ondersoek die manlikheid van die swart subjek deur 'n bespreking van seksualiteit en gender performatiwiteit. Uit hierdie hoofstuk blyk dit dat gender as performatief verskil van die essensialistiese aannames oor die onveranderlike aard van seksualiteit en gender. Visuele meganismes om rassistiese voorstellings van swart seksualiteit te bevraagteken, soos fopdosserie en performatiwiteit, word toegepas in die konstruksie van bevestigende beelde van swart manlikheid. Die laaste hoofstuk van die tesis konsentreer op my eie werk as voorbeeld van verbeeldingryke vorme van selfvoorstelling. Gesamentlik dien die drie dele van die argument as teoretiese raamwerk waarin my eie praktyk geplaas kan word.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In this thesis I interrogate South African photography of the black male body from a contemporary perspective, making reference to postcolonial theory. I will first provide an overview of photographic representations of the black male subject in South African photography. I will, in particular, focus my attention in the first chapter on the construct of race and the ‘noble savage’. The strategy is to outline the colonial discourse of representations by means of a historical overview of the developments that not only shaped but also influenced the visual discourse in photographing the black body. These observations and influences are then further discussed while considering issues of sexuality and gender representation in contemporary photography.

In this thesis, I argue that many depictions of the black male subject in contemporary South African photography draw on a colonial tradition in photography whereby the black man is depicted as a ‘primitive’ wild man. The definition of the word ‘primitive’ today generally designates certain social formations characterised by the absence of tools and technology widely available elsewhere (Torgovnick, 1990:19). In this thesis, the term refers to the colonised peoples that were regarded as natives in need of ‘civilising’ because of their low levels of moral development and technological competence (Maxwell, 2000:27). The purpose of this subjugation meant that African subjects were seen as ‘savages’ under the eyes of the Western man. This thesis aims at critiquing the myths and racial stereotypes surrounding the black male body that seek to define it as a ‘noble savage’

My aim is to critically examine visual discourses that expose the stereotypical representation of black male sexuality, offering my own photographic practice as an alternative critique. One of the aims of this thesis is to repudiate the problematic assumptions regarding the representation of the black body in contemporary South African photography. I argue, as my theoretical framework, that there are minor differences between the ethnographic imagery of Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin -who was an Irish born in (1874-1954) and arrived in South Africa during (1897). The German ethnographic photographer Gustav Theodor Fritsch (b.1834–1927), Joe and David Barnet (who worked between 1861-1897), and the Caney brothers –who worked in South Africa (between 1844-1899). And the documentary photographic practices of contemporary South African artists such as Pieter Hugo (b.1976-) Steve Hilton-Barber (b.1962-2002), Zanele Muholi (b.1972-) and Zwelethu Mthethwa

(b.1960-) are examples used to support this argument (Waller, 2000:199). The focus is on these photographers due to their problematic visual discourse of photographic representation into the black subject. Discussing some of these problematical ideological constructs serves as a means to change the perception that still dominates the minds of many photographers when photographing the black man. For example in contemporary photography, visual devices such as cropping, lighting, composition and perspective were previously employed to further the agenda of colonialism, which is to reinforce racial stereotyping. These visual devices are still applied unconsciously in order to reiterate the differences that served to divide black people. The perception of the ‘untouched’ African continent supports stereotypical representations of an ‘uncivilised’ nation. Representations of the black body as ‘effeminate’ or ‘hyper-masculine’ are just some of the racist misconceptions that still dominate black people’s photographic representations. The assumptions often associated with the black body are, for example, that women are imbued with “insatiable sexual appetite and that men have larger sexual organs” (Read, 1996:64). The other assumption is that black men possess a kind of stereotypical natural ‘unpredictability’, which is often linked with the colonial discourse and serves to reinforce fear of the ‘black phallus’ and the assumed ‘violent nature’ of the sexuality of the black subject. An example illustrated in figure 10 of the fear of the ‘black phallus’ is reiterated in the image by American photographer Robert Mapplethorpe’s *Man in a polyester suit* 1980.

The critical re-evaluation of some of these stereotypical notions that are often incorporated into contemporary visual discourses on the representation of the black male subject acts as a link with some of the problematical ideological aspects of representing the black body in contemporary South African photography. The ideology of sciences and races had a great impact on the basic principles of photography that were used in capturing the black subjects. According to American philosopher on black art and culture in the 20th century Richard J. Powell,

[T]he political and economic realities that surrounded the African encounters with Europeans gave their perceived racial difference a social and cultural dimension, an aspect that while life altering for peoples of African descent was obscured by the fact that blackness was a state of being that was rooted in perception (1997:10).

The way I understand the statement by Powell is that blackness was based on the idea of preserving the human dignity of the black subjects and, was more than just an ideological

difference but also a spiritual aspect supported by the ideas of humanity and religion that reiterated the racial boundaries between black subjects and westerners. The main focus is on investigating the devices that are employed by photographers in representations of the black body and that reflect not only evident issues of sexual identity but also issues of masculinity and blackness. There is an element of performativity in attempts at redefining or recreating an affirming image of the black male subject. I look at how terms such as ‘noble savage’ and ‘wild man’ and the methods of representation mentioned above are incorporated unintentionally into contemporary photographic representations of the black male subject. In order to identify the stereotypes created by the use of colonial visual codes, I need to compare them to key thematic concerns of the politics of representation, race, gender and sexuality. This line of argument attempts to dispose of myths about and stereotypical representations of the black male subject and to expose these as constructs. Contemporary photographic practices of South African artists incorporate in their use of visual language picturesque and idyllic scenes. The visual devices such as composition, lighting and cropping used in representing the black male subject often appropriate stereotypical representations of the sexuality of the black male body. In photographing the black body as a means to address the tensions of representation in an affirming light, the visual devices mentioned above seem to perpetuate the colonial visual discourse and vision.

I will look at the photographs of the late-19th-century anthropologists the Caney and Barnett brothers and A.M. Duggan-Cronin, in particular his *Morolong youth* photograph (Figure 6) (taken during the late 19th century), and I will analyse selected works by contemporary South African photographers, in particular Pieter Hugo (b. 1974-) and Steve Hilton-Barber (b.1962–2002). Hugo’s *John Addai, the wild honey collector, Techiman District, Ghana* and *Paul Ankomah, the wild honey collector, Techiman District, Ghana* (2005) (Figure 8) and *Mallam Galadima Ahmadu with Jamis, Abuja, Nigeria, The hyena and other men* (2005) (Figure 9) are discussed to aid the investigation of race and issues of representation.

The Caney and Barnett brothers, Duggan-Cronin, Hilton-Barber and Hugo are South African documentary photographers that incorporate visual devices such as the “full-frontal pose and sharpness of focus”, mentioned by Rosen, in representing the black male subject (1992:5). The portrayal of their subjects in their problematic photographs becomes an area of debate. Their images, according to Rosen, perpetuate stereotypes or myths about the black male subject as a ‘noble savage’ through their affinity with the notions of the ‘primitive’ wild man. The manner in which the images are created becomes a site of contesting meanings over the

images of black men; another side to the argument is whether the community that is photographed gets to see the images.

Postcolonial imagery of the black subject is often guilty of stereotyping race and gender through images that claim to be an unbiased representation that is based upon the re-enactment of false stereotypical assumptions. One of these was based upon the assumptions of the scientific practices of physiology and phrenology that were used as the basis for the so-called 'scientific' study of the human form. For example, the method often applied in photographing the black body appropriates British anthropologist and biologist Thomas Henry Huxley's technique that is based upon the anthropological study of the human form. Huxley's method of photography established a normative practice of the representation of the black body. Huxley's methods required that subjects be photographed "naked, their bodies posed in such a way that the viewer could make unimpeded cross comparisons with the anatomy of other racial groups". He further recommended that a plainly marked measuring rod be placed in the same plane as the subject, who was in turn photographed at a fixed distance from the camera (Bright, 2010:41). The problematical practices of using scientific means of capturing the imagery of the black male subject served to reiterate the stereotypical representations that enforced and entrenched boundaries of difference.

The scientific and Enlightenment direction based on the idea of photography as 'evidence' of the 'reality' of its subjects through the capturing of initiation rituals by Hilton-Barber in *Traditional Northern Sotho men* (1991) (Figure 7) and theatrical performances of spectacles by Hugo in *Mallam Galadima Ahmadu with Jamis, Abuja, Nigeria, The hyena and other men* (2005) (Figure 8) may be viewed as problematic and demeaning. The problem with these photographs is that they are encouraging the ideas of the great exhibitions of the late 19th century that served to put emphasis on cultural differences. These images depict so-called 'barbaric practices' that result in the definition of the representation of the black male subject as being 'primitive' and 'wild'. As a result of this, the viewer concludes that the people in the photographs are 'barbaric' because of their different cultural practices. Another important different view to this argument is that the subject in the case of Pieter Hugo's *Mallam Galadima Ahmadu with Jamis, Abuja, Nigeria, The hyena and other men* (2005) (Figure 8) are performers as in a circus troupe. They entertain and perform for audiences in order to make a living. Pieter Hugo merely documents the lifestyle that these Nigerian entertainers live.

In South Africa there has long been a tendency for certain photographers to present an idealised image of rural black life that is patently at odds with the realities of African experience. South African theorist and art historian Rhoda Rosen's article 'The documentary photographer and social responsibility' (1992) and Abigail Solomon-Godeau's book *Photography at the dock: Essays on photographic history, institutions and practices* (1991) both expose problematic colonial discourses in photography. These two texts play a critical role in drawing the basis for my argument that some of the contemporary South African photographers continue to unintentionally perpetuate the mistakes of colonial ethnographic photography. These texts investigate the historical development out of which stereotypical visual discourses used in contemporary art have arisen. Rhoda Rosen's article focuses on the work of South African documentary photographer Steve Hilton-Barber. In it she discusses how Hilton-Barber imposes his own Western traditions on the subject's reality. This text is important in outlining the visual discourses that make use of ethnographic visual devices that look to repress the black subject. The key thematic concern is the reuse of these ethnographic devices to re-create a certain ideal representation of the black subject.

Some of the artists mentioned in this thesis, such as American photographer Lyle Ashton Harris and Nigerian-born British photographer Rotimi Fani-Kayode and myself, show how the sexuality of the black man is represented in imaginative forms of representation of the self. Fani-Kayode's images, for example, are loaded with stereotypical representations of the black phallus as a means to critically engage in his work with an existing visual discourse whereby the black body is depicted as 'other' or as the 'fierce black phallus'. The visual strategies employed by the artists mentioned above provide critical alternatives to the problematic discourse identified above. The core texts supporting my argument include art historian Kobena Mercer's 'Eros and diaspora' (1997). In this text sexual identity and the black body are key thematic concerns that are discussed in relation to Rotimi Fani-Kayode's images. I will argue in support of what Fani-Kayode terms "imaginative acts of self-representation" in his essay 'Traces of ecstasy' (1996). I will outline this strategy through an analysis of selected works by Fani-Kayode and Harris.

Imaginative acts of self-representation are a contemporary form of photographic practice that consists of, according to Fani-Kayode, "imagery that re-appropriates colonial imagery and transforms them ritualistically into images of our own creation" (1996:6). This mode of photography involves the photographer portraying his or her own body and using the visual devices and props of colonial photography as a means of re-evaluating by subverting racist

colonial visual discourses. According to philosopher Anne Maxwell (2000:2), imaginative self-representation empowers the colonised by producing images that create a constructive perception of the black body. The practical component of my research has a similar focus to that of the argument presented in this thesis. It critically engages with the constructs of black male sexuality in South African photography by re-evaluating it. Fani-Kayode's images will be analysed in relation to my own photographs, establishing links and differences between his works, contemporary South African photographic practice, as well as my own work. Artists such as Fani-Kayode, Harris and I utilise the medium of photography to question existent photographic practices regarding black male sexuality. By seeking to create images that change perceptions surrounding the black body, I challenge the viewers to re-evaluate their assumptions. Imaginative self-representation is often employed by contemporary photographers to contest the idea that the sexuality of black men is 'animalistic' in character and that they are 'savages' that cannot be 'civilised' (hooks, 1992:34). In my own photographic practice, I place my own body within the visual discourses of colonialism and documentary photography, employing problematic devices that still dominate contemporary South African photography. My aim is to subvert these visual codes of representing the black man by exposing, re-evaluating and critiquing racial, sexual and gendered representations through photographic practices. I am aware of the tensions of authority and representation that are often associated with being seen as an agent of the 'silenced' or 'marginalised'.

One of the sources used, 'Fear of a black penis' by art historian Kobena Mercer (1994a), discusses issues of representation and the difficulties faced by black men when the dangerous simplifications of identity politics consistently fail to recognise that the political problem of power represented by straight white men is a problem not about persons but about ideological subject positions that reproduce relations of oppression. According Mercer,

The problem with white males is that they perceive black males within a stereotype characterized by inferiority and being capable of unmanageable violence and uncontrolled eroticism. Black males are feared for their generalized ability to display their sexuality and for their imagined offensiveness against white females. The concept of white supremacy is carried over even among people of the same gender, and is expressed in violence against black men (1994a:80).

Making political statements that are seen as representative of black people's point of view is the burden that they carry, but trying to accommodate all the historical struggles of black

people in one work is another challenge that they encounter when facing opportunities such as exhibiting their work in some of the well-known institutions (Mercer, 1994b:234). [B]ell hooks in her book *Black looks: Race and representation* (1992) highlights the problematic discourses of the representation of the black subject.

Nigerian-born art historian and curator Okwui Enwezor writes on the politics of representation in contemporary South Africa in '*Reframing the black subject: Ideology and fantasy in contemporary South African representation*' (1997). Here Enwezor uses South African artists Candice Breitz and Pippa Skotnes as examples in highlighting his claims regarding how the black subject is subjected through the use of racist Western principles that reinforce colonial discourses. Enwezor criticises the two South African artists' works of art and how they make use of ethnographic photographic conventions in representing the black subject, for example visual devices of representation such as "the isolated body and narrow space", mentioned by Rosen (1992:5). They are just some of the 'imperialist representations' that seek to dominate the black body (Solomon-Godeau, 1991:221). These visual devices are photographic methods used in the construction of the black male subject as a 'primitive' being. The argument that Enwezor tries to convey in his criticism of Breitz and Skotnes is the manner in which photographs of black subjects by white artists seem to be lacking in truths about the circumstances of the reality of the subjects. This Enwezor says is evident through the use of formulaic photographic practices. Enwezor's criticism, according to Pultz (1995:24), is of the use of the methods of photography as an instrument of colonialism in order to strengthen the hierarchical ideology of domination of non-white subjects. This is an argument that needs a more in-depth discussion and is dealt with in the first chapter. In response to Enwezor's claims, I will reference *Grey areas: Representation, identity and politics in contemporary South African art* (Atkinson & Breitz, 1999).

In the first chapter of this thesis, entitled 'South African photography and the construct of the 'primitive' and the 'noble savage', the problematic visual discourse that served to make the black body appear as 'alien' and 'other' is outlined in order to flesh out the different ideologies that shaped the manner in which it is represented and seen. In this chapter I discuss the problematic visual devices and methods of photographing the black male subject. I identify a particular colonial visual discourse used in the photographic representation of the black male subject. In the first chapter the historical traditions of colonial photography resurface in contemporary South African photography through the images of South Africans Steve Hilton-Barber and Pieter Hugo. Their works are discussed in this chapter as a starting

point to analyse the basis for problematical constructs such as the ‘noble savage’ and ‘hyper-masculinity’.

The photographic representation of the ‘other’ and the visual language that was developed to represent criminality in certain areas of Western Europe formed part of the visual discourses of domination and control of the black body (Sekula, 1992:356). British art historian and photographer John Tagg suggests that there is a visual connection between police photographic practices (surveillance) and ethnographic photography (Rosen, 1992:5). In looking at the different visual discourses that seek to differentiate black male subjects from their white male counterparts, I identify a number of photographers who utilise some of the demeaning visual devices. The black male body has been subjected to stereotypical visual representations such as ‘hyper-sexuality’ and the notion of the ‘noble savage’, as seen in Steve-Hilton Barber’s *Traditional Northern Sotho men* (1991) (Figure 7). The problematic photographic practices apparent in Pieter Hugo’s images are examples of how the appropriation of unpleasant means of photographing the black male subject influences contemporary South African photography, for example *Mallam Galadima Ahmadu with Jamis, Abuja, Nigeria, The hyena and other men* (2005) (Figure 8).

The second chapter, entitled ‘Imaginative acts of self-representation as a critical alternative to colonial photographic practices in contemporary art’, presents alternative photographic approaches to the black body, and a comparison between documentary photographic practices and imaginative self-representation is drawn. Imaginative self-representation in photography is outlined in order to create a platform to discuss some of my photographic practices in response to the problematic visual representations of the sexuality of the black male subject. The problem is with the use of mythological representations and also colonial visual discourses to identify with the sexuality of the subjects in the images as ‘primitive’. The purpose of exposing these notions based on false assumptions is to reveal the construct of photographic representation. An example of these stereotypical conventions can be seen in the images of the black body by American photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, particularly his *Man in a polyester suit* (1980) (Figure 10). The strategy of using imaginative self-representation as a device to subvert some of these racist norms that are critiqued seeks to create alternate forms of black sexuality.

Chapter 3, entitled ‘Photographic practices of sexuality as a construct of the performance of the self through gender performativity’, considers sexuality and gender as a performative act.

The theoretical outline focuses on gender performativity as a means to show how sexuality becomes a construct through representations of the self. The focus on gender performativity is a starting point to the discussion of the many complex masculinities of the black subject. The visual devices of drag and imitation are applied as visual mechanisms in order to critically assess the conventions of gender. The subtopic of this chapter focuses on the performing of the self through representations of sexuality in contemporary photography through discussions of the works of American photographers such as Lyle Ashton Harris. The politics of representation in terms of race, gender and sexuality in contemporary photography are discussed by looking at images by artists such as South African Zanele Muholi. The issue that is discussed in this chapter is how representations of masculinity become the focus when it comes to photographs of black sexuality. The works of Lyle Ashton Harris are also discussed as examples of gender performativity.

Chapter 4, 'Photographic practices by South African artists with my own work as a critical response through self-portraits', focuses on homoeroticism and self-representation through photography and the influence of Fani-Kayode's works on my own. I also consider the influence of other artists such as Lyle Ashton Harris in dealing with issues of sexuality and race. My own works of art are referenced in a discussion of gay sexuality. Figure 25, *Ze* (2010), for example, is based on a series of movements. I was inspired by classical imagery of the male body. The meaning of the word 'Ze' is derived from the Xhosa word for 'nude'. My intention with this series is to expose issues of masculinity and myths surrounding the sexuality of the black body. Antidepressant pills and generic medication are used as decorative body markings, referencing tribal markings typical of native South African tribes such as the Xhosa. The aim of the work is to destabilise gender norms and question existent forms of representations of the black body through the use of subversive visual devices.

The strategies often used in the visual representation of the black male subject by South African artists are not objective enough. This thesis starts out by outlining the visual discourse in photography whereby the black male subject is depicted as 'marginalised' and 'other'. It then poses acts of imaginative self-representation as a critical alternative through an analysis of the works of Rotimi Fani-Kayode and Lyle Ashton Harris. Sexuality and gender performativity are theoretical standpoints that some of these imaginative forms of photographic practice stem from. This thesis concludes with a discussion of my own work as an example of such strategies in photography.

South African photography and the construct of the ‘primitive’ and the ‘noble savage’

The construction of the black man as ‘shiftless and lazy’ was created in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by white men in order to purposely denigrate and humiliate the black man (hooks, 1992:90). During the great exhibits of the latter half of the 19th century in Europe specifically in France and England, colonised people were portrayed as ‘flawed’ or ‘fractured’ characters, meaning that they were less likely to be trustworthy (Maxwell, 2000:2). This thesis is a critique of such examples of stereotyped representations in South African photography of the black male body and sexuality. It does so by providing a genealogical account of the tradition in South African photography whereby the body of the black man is depicted as ‘other’.

Furthermore, when it came to sex, colonised men were seen in legal, medical and psychiatric colonial discourse as ‘feminised’, ‘weak’ or ‘emasculated’ (Read, 1996:64). Because of the stereotypical influences of science emphasis was placed on the biological and cultural differences between black and white people. An example of the discrimination was often the use of skin colour as a common distinction of race. The construction of racial differences had to do with the nature of the societies that Europeans visited the class of people who were being observed, as well as whether trade or settlement was the objective of the visitors. Colonisers differed in their modes of interacting with the local populations; these differences had a profound impact on racial discourses and identities (Loomba, 1998:110).

In this chapter I seek to expose the problematic visual discourse with reference to the black body and the construction of problematical representations such as the ‘noble savage’ evident in and ethnographic images of the black male subject. In order to engage with the problematic discourse, one has to first flesh out the ideas that dominated the defining of black sexuality. Indian theorist Ania Loomba in her book *Colonialism-postcolonialism* (1998) argues as follows:

“Construction” should not be understood as a process which totally excludes the responses and reactions of those who were being represented. This does not mean that the vast populations that were stereotyped in colonial discourses were responsible for their own images; rather, the very process of misrepresentation worked upon certain specific features of the situation at hand. Thus misrepresentations or constructions need to be unravelled rather than simply attributed to some timeless, unchanging notion of racism or Orientalism (1998:110).

Evidence of this kind of photographic discourse in a South African context can be seen throughout the photographs of Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin in his 1928 series *The Bantu tribes of Southern Africa*. In his photographs there is the construction of the ‘picturesque’, ‘romantic’ and ‘idyllic’ scenery that tends to make people think that these images are a ‘true’ representation of South African rural life. According to South African theorist and art historian Michael Godby, the creation of such imagery was a means to justify the exploitation and dehumanising of the South African subject through migrant labour (2001:18-21). These are the kinds of colonial discourse that still dominate representations of the black male subject. For example, the notion of the ‘noble savage’ was a construction of ethnographic photography aimed at creating a less humane image of the black subject by defining it as a racial type (Maxwell, 2000:28).

Theorist Hayden White further argues,

The concept of Noble Savage stands over against, and undercuts, the notion, not of the ‘Wild Man’, but rather of ‘noble man’.... The very notion of ‘man’ is comprehensible only as it stands in opposition to ‘wild’ and that term’s various synonyms and cognates. There is no contradictions in ‘wild savage’ since these are in fact the same words.... But given the theory of the classes prevailing at the same time, ‘Noble Savage’ is an anomaly, since the idea of nobility (or Aristocracy) stands opposed to the presumed ‘wildness’ and ‘savagery’ of other social orders as ‘civility’ stands to ‘barbarism’. As thus envisaged, the ‘Noble Savage’ idea represents not so much an elevation of the idea of the native as demotion of the idea of nobility. That this is so can be seen by its usage, in the one side, and by its effects, on the other. It appears everywhere that nobility is under attack; it has no effect whatsoever on the treatment of the natives or on the way natives are viewed by their oppressors. Moreover, the idea of the ‘Noble Savage’ brings to the fore or calls up its opposite: that is to say, the notion of the ignorable ‘savage’, which has as much currency in literate circles in Europe as its opposite (White cited in Loomba, 1998:132).

The widespread popular attitudes either idealised the ‘noble savages’ as unspoilt and ‘pure’ surviving members of the Garden of Eden or else demonised them as ‘uncivilised’ heathens, an inferior species to be feared and controlled (Cooper, 1990:55). According to theorist Hayden White in the book *Tropic of discourse: Essays in cultural criticism* (1987), the ideological effect of the term ‘noble savage’ is “to draw a distinction between presumed types

of humanity on manifestly qualitative grounds, rather than such superficial bases as skin colour, physiognomy, or social status (White cited in Loomba, 1998:118). The ‘noble savage’ idea therefore represents a rupture, a contradiction between interiority and external characteristics are disturbed. Similarly, the converted heathen and the educated native are images that cannot entirely or easily be reconciled to the idea of absolute difference. While at one level they represent colonial achievements, at another they stand for impurity and the possibility of mixing, or to use the term that has become central to postcolonial theory, ‘hybridist’” (White cited in Loomba, 1998:119).

In some of the colonies, nakedness was a normal state and the colonised found it peculiar to be clothed. This was turned into a point of cultural difference by some Westerners. In order to show their ‘civilised’ way of life for all to follow, Westerners had to impose their conventions and traditions onto the colonised (Cooper, 1990:55). These differences fed into colonial stereotyping such as the notion of the ‘wild man’ and the ‘noble savage’. According to Ania Loomba, the constructions of racial and cultural differences such as the ones mentioned above were based on certain observed features, the imperatives of the colonists and preconceptions about the natives. Moreover, they were filtered through the dynamics of actual encounters. She further argues that

New World natives have been projected as birthed by the European encounter with them; accordingly, a discourse of primitivism surrounds them. On the other hand, the East is constructed as ‘barbaric’ or ‘degenerate’. Differences were ‘noted’ within each group such as the ‘wild men’ and ‘noble savages’ – the former were represented as violent and brutish, the latter as gentle and civil (Loomba, 1998:108).

Both, however, were regarded as ‘inferior’ to white people. In some cases, colour was the most important signifier of cultural and racial difference, as in the representation of Africans (Loomba, 1998:109).

Critical alternatives to colonial documentary imagery often construct black masculinity as ‘fearless’ and courageous in opposition to the ‘feminisation’ and ‘emasculatation’ of the colonised black man in colonial images (Read, 1996:61). This is in order to compensate for the dominant perceptions that still persist in contemporary South African photography. Colonial discourse’s fascination and obsession with the black body was aimed at dehumanising the black male body in order to make it appear as ‘remote’, ‘other’ and ‘alien’ (Bright, 2010:62). Examples of this are seen in the images by South African 21st-century

photographers Pieter Hugo and Steve Hilton-Barber, 19th-century documentary photographer Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin, the Caney and Barnett brothers and German photographer Gustav Theodor Fritsch. In the attempt to create alternative forms of visual representation, non-white artists such as myself, South African Zwelethu Mthethwa, British Nigerian-born photographer Rotimi Fani-Kayode and American Lyle Ashton Harris have carried the burden of critically positioning the black male body as less threatening. The works by Hugo question the notion of ‘primitive’ native.

Sexual and gendered representations of the black male subject are often viewed under the spotlight of the white male myth (Enwezor, 1997:23). The photographic practice of surveillance and regulation employed throughout the late 19th century by ethnographic photographers is reinforced today by documentary photographers. It is important to draw a comparison between ethnographic photographic practices and contemporary photography when looking at how the black male subject’s sexuality is defined and represented (Waller, 2000:199). The techniques and visual devices that are applied to the representation of the black male subject are similar to the ethnographic imagery that was used to document the sexuality of the ‘other’. The term ‘other’, used to define the colonised people, formed part of the rhetoric of control and dominance by the white man (Mercer, 1994b:8).

British photographer John Tagg identified the following key visual devices used to define the ‘other’ in photographic practices:

[t]he simple, plain studio background, the frontal pose, the way in which the attention is directed towards the face and the hands, the narrow space, and the isolated body and the sharpness of focus (Rosen, 1992:5).

German ethnographic photographer Gustav Theodor Fritsch in the book *An eloquent picture gallery: The South African portrait photographs of Gustav Theodor Fritsch 1863–1865*, edited by Keith Dietrich and Andrew Banks in 2008, and British anthropologist and biologist Thomas Henry Huxley uses the ethnographic conventions mentioned below in photographing the black body. These photographic conventions are appropriated from the scientific practices of phrenology and physiognomy. These scientific practices, offered by 19th-century Thomas Henry Huxley, had ethnographic requirements that came with photographing the black body. According to Huxley, the methods of photographing the black body were the following:

The entire figure should not be less than three inches long. It would be extremely convenient to have every photograph of the same length, as the relative proportions of the different figures could then be apprehended almost at a glance. A standard length of four inches would, I imagine, be easily managed by the photographer and would suffice for the purpose of the Ethnologist.

The person photographed should be in a condition of absolute nudity, or as near to as practicable. Two views of each subject should be taken; the one presenting an exact front view and the other an exact profile. In the front view, the subject should be in an attitude of attention, except that the right arm should be stretched out horizontally; the hand being fully open, the fingers and thumb extended, and the palm turned forwards. The feet should be parallel, the ankles hardly touching one other.

The arm will need a rest, to prevent it from trembling, and a measuring rod, divided to feet and inches, may either be fixed to this rest, or otherwise supported in the plane of the body, so as to furnish a scale.

In the profile view the left arm should be turned to the eyes of the photographer, and the left arm bent at the elbow, and so disposed as not to interfere with the dorsal contour of the trunk, or with the outline of the pectoral region. The back of the hand should be displayed, the fingers and thumb being extended.

Photographs of heads should be so taken as to give an exact full face, and an exact profile of each head. Three quarter views are as useful as accessories, but are of very little value by themselves, within reasonable limits, the larger the photographs of heads the better, but a scale, divided to inches and tenths should be photographed along each head (Huxley cited in Cooper, 1990:277).

Ideologies of racial difference were intensified by their incorporation into the discourse of science. Science claimed to demonstrate that the biological features of each group determined its psychological and social attributes (Loomba, 1998:115). The kind of system of repression that photography was based on was mainly due to the scientific and racist means of social control, one being the anthropometric diagram by Alphonse Bertillon (Figure 1: *Metric photography* [1893]), illustrated in this thesis (Sekula, 1992:357). The racist ideology of white supremacy reinserts itself into contemporary photographic practices through superstitious beliefs based on the fear of the black body, such as the so-called ‘animalistic’

attributes of the black man. Racial profiling and the sciences of physiognomy and phrenology are some of the ethnographic photographic conventions that influenced the way in which black subjects were seen through photography (Sekula, 1992:356). Photography became an instrument to classify and measure non-white races. The manner in which the black body is cast into colonial roles such as the ‘noble savage’ is problematic because it is often demeaning and oppressive. Terms such as ‘noble savage’ and ‘hyper-masculine’ assisted in the ‘othering’ of the black body (Bhabha, 1999:374).

According to Ania Loomba, “[R]aces are socially imagined rather than biological realities” (1998:121). Race, gender and sexuality are constructs through visual coding techniques appropriated from the disciplines of visual discourse. These photographic visual devices include “composition, perspective, cropping and lighting, the drapery of the subject, posture and gesture” (Stevenson & Stewart, 2001:23). The progression of ethnographic visual devices into contemporary photographic practices is problematic. Ethnographic photography conformed to racist conventions in order to dominate and dehumanise the black body.

An example of this progression of problematic visual discourses is the images illustrated in Figure 2 of two South African subjects, Mfengu men, photographed during the late 19th century by an unidentified photographer, titled *Fingo swells*, and also in Figure 3, *Chief Teteleku-Natal*, found in the book *Surviving the lens: Photographic studies of south and east African people, 1870–1920* by Michael Stevenson and Michael Graham-Stewart (2001). In Figure 2 the two young Mfengu men are each draped in a robe that covers the entire figure, and they also are wearing what looks like beaded jewellery and holding traditional weapons with pouches around their neckline. The illustration of the two young Mfengu men employs a method often seen in ethnographic photographic representations of the black man. The representation of the young men in this image is similar to that in *Chief Teteleku-Natal* (Figure 3) in that they are wearing traditional garments or are in some sort of rural landscape. The composition of the centralised figure and the full-frontal pose all point to the scientific ethnographic visual method of representing the black body as ‘alien’ and ‘other’.

Figure 4, an image by the Caney Brothers (1844–1899) titled *Ordinary and fighting dress of two natives in their traditional regalia*, Figure 5 by British photographer Joe Barnett (1861–1897) titled *Woman standing in a studio* and Figure 6, Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin’s *Morolong youth*, taken in the late 19th century, make use of anthropological conventions. These are lighting and cropping of the body into a full-frontal profile, and the posture and

gestures of the subjects are evident of the scientific discourses influencing the means of representing the subjects. These visual devices seek to recreate stereotypical gendered norms of representation, as seen in the anthropometric diagram used by Alphonse Bertillon's *Metric photography* (1893), illustrated in Figure 1. The focus in the illustration is on the subject's physiognomic features: facial features and skin tones (Pultz, 1995:23). There seems to be a different tone in *Morolong youth* (Figure 6), taken in the late 19th century, in which the subject seems less intimidated in front of the camera. The gesture and smile of the subject suggest that he is at ease with the photographer. The youth has no clothes on except for a beaded necklace with a wooden charm around his neck. This puts emphasis on the 'hyper-masculine' body of the young black subject by exposing the bulging muscles of the youth's torso. This image is one of a few exceptions evident as representations of the black man in which the subject is confident and comfortable with the gaze of the viewer. The kind of imagery that is suggested where the black male subject is concerned is normally focused on the physical; for example, black men are viewed as endowed with a 'larger sex organ' (Maxwell, 2000:33). The isolated figure, cropping of the arms and framing of the subject act to emphasise biological differences, and this is due to the scientific discourses that played a role in shaping the way in which photographs were taken. The images in *Morolong youth* (Figure 6), *Fingo swells* (Figure 2) and *Chief Teteleku-Natal* (Figure 3) was created using the anthropometric technique of photographing, for example a head-and-shoulders image and the full-frontal profile suggested by British anthropologist Thomas Henry Huxley. These visual devices are similar to the kind of scientific means applied in the construction of the representation of the black body through colonial ethnographic practices by German photographer Gustav Theodor Fritsch.

From the images that are used as examples in this chapter, it is evident that there is little difference between Steve Hilton-Barber's *Traditional Northern Sotho men* (Figure 7), the unidentified photographer's *Fingo swells* (Figure 2) and *Zulu Chief Teteleku-Natal* (Figure 3), and Duggan-Cronin's *Morolong youth* (Figure 6). In Figure 7, two young men are seated in the foreground. Their posture is slouched and uncomfortable in the bus seats. The tense body language of their hunched backs and their heads sunk into their chests suggests this conclusion. In another example of Hilton-Barber's series of works under the same title, the way in which the boys are lined up, some are standing in front while others act as foliage of the camera. Just like in the use of a backdrop emphasis is placed upon them as a simple backdrop, like in a studio. The camera identifies 'racial types' rather than individuals; for

example, it foregrounds the points of similarity between the boys. They are all frontally placed and confront the camera nakedly with their arms crossed in a vulnerable gesture that is mirrored by their glances, which are all turned away from the camera (Rosen, 1992:5). In another photograph under titled *Traditional Northern Sotho men* (Figure 7), the black body is photographed naked in front of a backdrop depicting a wild habitat, thus placing the subject in an ‘other’ landscape. Oftentimes, the racist implication and alienating intent of such visual discourses are not considered. Under close comparison, both images share the same distancing of the subject that creates an unequal footing between the subject and the viewer (Bright, 2010:15).

The focus on landscape and appropriation in Hilton-Barber’s images can be associated with the seizures of land during the colonial conquest of Africa. A true reflection of the subject’s natural surroundings is replaced with mythical representations of the subject’s so-called ‘reality’. The viewer assumes that the true nature of these images is the subject’s reality. In attempting to dehumanise the black subject’s body, the artist employs colonial visual devices such as the binary oppositions of master/slave and savage/civilised. In documenting the ritual of circumcision, Hilton-Barber fails to take into account the young initiates’ feelings and, more importantly, he fails to respect their privacy. Furthermore, the subject is not consulted on who gets to see their image, an issue that is contested in representations of his work. An investigation of the images referenced here looks critically at how the black subject is positioned in visual discourse.

The colonial discourses manifest in the photographic practices that reinforce the unpleasant assumptions such as ‘hyper-sexuality’ created by South African documentary photographers Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin, Steve Hilton-Barber and Pieter Hugo. The language employed when describing documentary photography is often problematic. The term ‘appropriation’ associated with the seizure of land during colonialism is one such example mentioned when looking at Steve Hilton-Barber’s *Traditional Northern Sotho men* in Figure 7 (hooks, 1992:7). The resilience of colonial discourse identifies its subjects as ‘racial types’ and not as individuals with a shared history and continues to inform views on contemporary photography, according to art historian Rhoda Rosen (1992:5).

The subject in the images by Duggan-Cronin, Fritsch and Hilton-Barber is removed from the context of his or her daily life and is defined as a racial type and specimen (Pultz, 1995:23). During the colonial period of 1900–1940, documentary photography was employed as an

instrument of 'surveillance and control' to further the colonial agenda (Solomon-Godeau, 1991:175). The camera became an instrument to categorise and classify races, and it served both honorific and repressive functions, for example to look up to one's 'betters' and look down on one's 'inferiors' (Sekula, 1992:347). For example, the colonised people from the African continent were seen as 'savages', and this was a technique used to reinforce differences between the 'civilised' and the natives based on stereotypical assumptions such as that of 'hyper-sexuality' and 'barbaric' cultural practices. These assumptions were based on the idea that through applying the scientific techniques of physiology and phrenology, one could assess the inner character of the subject from just the outward signs of the face and head and the surface of the body (Loomba, 1998:115). The sciences of phrenology and physiognomy often were used to support and justify racist theories that sought to undermine the rights of non-white subjects.

Social theorist and philosopher Michel Foucault suggests that photography is instrumental in establishing and maintaining power (Pultz, 1995:9). Foucault states that the notion of a free and liberal society in which photographers practise is actually a subtle means of social control (Pultz, 1995:9). Hence, the issue that is referred to in the chapter comes from assuming that artists are agents of their communities and protagonists in their communities (Mercer, 1994b:235). The assumption of being a scientist that is 'objective' and impartial to social conventions and whereby a photographer assumes a neutral role can be misleading. There is always an unconscious decision made by photographers in the act of creating an image of a subject. The photograph is no more than a mere interpretation of the artist's social reality that is imposed upon its subjects (Rosen, 1992:11; Sontag, 1979:154).

An example of this is found in Hilton-Barber's *Traditional Northern Sotho men* (Figure 7). The series of images of young BaSotho initiates photographed on his father's farm in Tzaneen is an example of how the photographer imposes his own notions of representation of the initiation into manhood (Waller, 2000:197). The images are a document of the ritual of *Polotso*, Sotho for the ritual of circumcision that is seen as a rite of passage. In the act of trying to demystify the ritual of initiation into manhood through his images, Steve Hilton-Barber inadvertently and unintentionally perpetuates the stereotype of the black man as 'primitive wild man' (Rosen, 1992:4). In one image, the young men are photographed as if they are a herd of cattle. The young men are all huddled up as a group facing away from the cameras intrusive gaze. The manner in which the image is composed reinforces this notion of a 'primitive' group of young initiates. In an attempt to shed light on these ancient rituals,

Hilton-Barber defines the black body along false and unpleasant colonial assumptions such as 'wild man'. He imposes his own preconceived and unquestioned notions about the subject (Waller, 2000:253). This form of misrepresentation creates a kind of system of domination in which the 'other' is seen as 'inferior' to the white man (Solomon-Godeau, 1991: xxxix). This is the agenda of the colonialist, used in contemporary photography to reinforce the tensions of representing the black man. The depiction of the 'barbaric' act of circumcision renders the subject as 'uncivilised'. The race of the photographer should be considered. It is assumed that because a white photographer created the images of this ritual of *Polotso*, the images are an 'objective' representation of the ritual of initiation into manhood. Unlike Foucault's 'liberal' and independent individual that 'objectively' captures the black body in a 'flattering' manner, Steve Hilton-Barber attempts to document this tradition of a young man's rite of passage from the perspective of an outsider that is 'unbiased'. The photographic evidence of the ritual serves as an empirical example of the lifestyle of the BaSotho people that reinforces the notion of 'primitive' cultural practices. Hilton-Barber misinforms us rather than enlightens us about this ancient ritual of initiation into manhood. The fragmented images and isolated views make it impossible to construct a chronology for the images in *Traditional Northern Sotho men* (Figure 7). They tell a story of Hilton-Barber's own tradition and project the Western history of art onto this ceremony (Rosen, 1992:8).

The discussion of some of the contemporary works of art in this thesis highlights the different aspects of being seen as an agent of those that are seen as less important or on the margins of dominant culture. The debate concerning the artist as the authoritative voice and his or her right to speak on behalf of the subject is significant. Brenda Atkinson and Candice Breitz (1999) in *Grey areas: Representation, identity, and politics in contemporary South African art* question whether race alone becomes the determining factor of the right to represent or speak on behalf of black people in South African art. This is an important debate that is discussed in the next subtopic by looking at two South African artists' works.

The problem of the race of the photographer arises in the production of the works by the two South African artists mentioned in this chapter. The problem of being seen as the agent of a community or an individual subject represented in an image is that there are assumptions that are inherent in the practice of taking a photograph of a black body. In Figure 6, Duggan-Cronin's *Morolong youth*, and Figure 7, Hilton-Barber's *Traditional Northern Sotho men*, the subjects are naked, which implies the 'primitive' nature of the black subject as always naked. The black male subject is depicted as an 'untouched eternal child' of nature that roams the

wild and has the character of a ‘noble savage’ (Pultz, 1992:28). This is the case in Hilton-Barber’s images. He depicts the subjects in Figure 7 as a ‘primitive’ group in need of ‘civilising’. In this case the camera is an instrument used to ‘control’ and ‘regulate’ the manner in which the black body is represented. The visual devices of colonial discourse used in capturing the ritual of circumcision dehumanises the black body. There is one image in the series *Traditional Northern Sotho men* (Figure 7) in which the subject is isolated in a farmland backdrop. This reinforces the notion of appropriation and the conquest of land, for example the ‘scramble for Africa’.

The camera is an extension of Hilton Barber’s dominating gaze. This supports my central argument that problematic and racist visual representations are still evident in contemporary photography and are still used to construct the sexuality of the black male subject as ‘hyper-sexual’ and ‘primitive’. The visual devices used in Hilton-Barber’s images are similar to the ones that first appeared in ethnographic imagery during the colonial period of the late 19th century. They accentuate racial and cultural differences between black and white people. The visual conventions adopted from anthropology on which this thesis focuses are the use of painting devices such as “the construction of various picture planes, perspectives, spatial arrangements and lighting” (Stevenson & Stewart, 2001:23). The other conventions often used include “pose, drapery of the subjects, gesture and posture” (2001:23).

Colonial visual representations applied in the construction of the ‘primitive’ black man in contemporary South African photography.

Contemporary photographic practices have been fascinated with the notion of the ‘spectacle’, typical of ethnographic displays of the great colonial exhibitions. I will argue that the contemporary white photographers Pieter Hugo and Steve Hilton-Barber subconsciously perpetuate this despite claims of the documentary in their work. Hugo’s *Mallam Galadima Ahmadu with Jamis, Abuja, Nigeria, The hyena and other men* (2005) (Figure 9) depict the black subject as spectacle. The series of images by Hugo of Nigerian entertainers that roam the streets of Nigeria showcasing their ‘tamed’ wild animals reinforces the notion of the ‘primitive’. The obsession with mythical representations of the black male subject is a colonial visual mechanism used to reinforce the fear of the ‘unpredictable black savage.’ Some of the visuals of the ethnographic photographic representations are evident in the photography of Hilton-Barber despite his own intentions for his work to be documentary. The works of Hugo and Hilton-Barber show the dominant misconceptions of race evident in documentary photography. The inherent flaws and misconceptions of documentary photographic practices concerning race and ‘primitivism’ have been discussed in this chapter.

Hugo’s images of Nigerian entertainers are an example of ‘performance photography’. The staging of the photographs in *John Addai, the wild honey collector, Techiman District, Ghana* and *Paul Ankomah, the wild honey collector, Techiman District, Ghana* (Figure 8) and in *Mallam Galadima Ahmadu with Jamis, Abuja, Nigeria, The hyena and other men* (Figure 9) from Nigeria recalls visual devices adopted from the colonial photographic discourses. ‘Blackness’ is constructed here as spectacle. The constructs of race, gender and sexuality, as can be seen in the images of Hilton-Barber of the young Basotho initiates, seek to dominate the black subject. Contemporary photographic practices are problematical in their use of colonial visual devices as they assert stereotypical constructs of the black subject in an unpleasant manner.

Rosen argues that Hilton-Barber uses visual devices that are appropriated from ethnographic photography, specifically “the frontal pose, the isolated body and the sharpness of focus, posture and gesture” and the use of a stick – reminiscent of the instruments of measurement used in ethnographic photography (Rosen, 1992:5). These visual devices observed by Rosen can be seen just as strongly in Hugo’s photographs, looking at his imagery in *John Addai, the wild honey collector, Techiman District, Ghana* and *Paul Ankomah, the wild honey collector,*

Techiman District, Ghana (Figure 8) and in *Mallam Galadima Ahmadu with Jamis, Abuja, Nigeria* (Figure 9), respectively. These devices are also apparent in *Fingo swells* (Figure 2) and *Chief Teteleku-Natal* (Figure 3) by an unidentified photographer, and *Ordinary and fighting dress of two natives in their traditional regalia* (Figure 4) by the Caney brothers. The men in figures 2, 3 and 4 are all carrying traditional weapons, and one of the men, Chief Teteleku-Natal in Figure 3, is wearing what looks like animal skins around his head and waist. In Figure 4, one of the men is facing the camera and wears a traditional animal skin while the other is looking at the man facing the camera and is carrying traditional weapons. They are North-Nguni warriors and both are carrying what looks like a knobkerrie and also a spear and a shield. There is a visual mechanism in the images illustrated in figures 2, 3 and 4 that draws on the similarities in the dress code, the skins and the fabric evident in Hugo's *Mallam Galadima Ahmadu with Jamis, Abuja, Nigeria* (Figure 9). Figure 9 is a typical example of the depiction of a 'noble savage' by a white South African photographer in the image of these Nigerian entertainers (2005). The similarities between Figure 9 by Hugo and figures 2 and 3 by an unidentified photographer are uncanny. We see the same stance, the same centralised full-frontal pose, the subtly confrontational stance and expression – dignified and perhaps even arrogant. Even more telling is the use of props or accessories in the creation of the image. In Figure 2 and Figure 3, the weapon is a spear and a shield, creating a spectacle of ethnic curiosity, as does the 'weapon' in Figure 9. In Figure 9, though, the weapon is a wild animal, doubly reinforcing the notion of the savage, arguably more problematic in how the subject is presented.

The strong union with the land and the association with weapons such as a spear and shield generate the perception that the people of Africa are 'savage' and cannot be 'civilised'. Because of their close affinity with nature, black subjects are seen as 'untamed, innocent creatures' (the descendants of the Garden of Eden) that are 'uncivilised' and in need of guidance. The notion of the taming of the wild land and its inhabitants is linked to the belief that the black male subject and the land that he resides in are in need of 'civilisation' and 'cultivation' through being subjected to 'civilised' forms of Western behaviour and beliefs. The problem with the appropriation of these colonial visual devices of representing black male sexuality that seek to dominate the black man is that they reinforce the stereotypical representation such as 'hyper-sexuality' that non-white artists seek to transform.

The representation of the sexuality of the black man is something that influences the manner in which the black man is seen and eventually represented. In contemporary South African art

and photography, it is assumed that the photographer or artist has the authority to speak on behalf of his or her subject. This is inappropriate, particularly if one considers the burden of colonial ethnographic photographic principles still evident in the current representation of the black subject by photographers (Solomon-Godeau, 1991:221). According to British photographer John Tagg, ethnographic photographic practice that draws its influences from the earlier 20th-century police practices informs the manner in which the black body is perceived through photography on the contemporary art scene. The making of visual representations of the black body by non-black people is something that is problematic and needs to be addressed, because assumptions about the black body have been uncontested for so long that they are regarded as factual.

The other major determinant to be discussed in this chapter is race and the idea that the colour of the artist's skin becomes the determinant factor in how his or her work is consumed and appreciated by the audience. Examples of these kinds of reaction to racialised representations can be seen in the manner in which the images by Hilton-Barber and Hugo are positioned. In Hugo's images, a clear distinction is drawn between the dominant master and the submissive pet in the form of the so-called 'tamed' wild animal. The subject in the series of Nigerian entertainers or *The hyena and other men* (2005) in Figure 9: *Mallam Galadima Ahmadu with Jamis, Abuja, Nigeria* has internalised the racist colonial discourses of domination and applied them to the domesticating of the wild animals. Hilton-Barber's act of 'demystifying' the ritual of initiation into manhood inadvertently perpetuates a stereotypical representation of black men's culture as "static, fixed and uncivilised" (Bhabha, 1999:370) in the process of removing the so-called 'shroud of secrecy' that continues to mystify the events and representations of these ancient rituals such as in *Traditional Northern Sotho men* (Figure 7) and *Mallam Galadima Ahmadu with Jamis, Abuja, Nigeria, The hyena and other men* (Figure 9). In Hugo's images of the Nigerian entertainers in Figure 9, the problematic view of the 'other' that is an exponent of the Enlightenment period perspective about the dark character of the black subject is being perpetuated through the stereotypical representations of the black man. Another visual device used is the method of measuring in *John Addai, the wild honey collector, Techiman District, Ghana* and *Paul Ankomah, the wild honey collector, Techiman District, Ghana* (Figure 8). The pose of colonised people holding a knobkerrie is associated with the pose of natives with a measuring line that was first used in some of the ethnographic images of 19th-century anthropologist Thomas H. Huxley, a professor of biology and follower of the theory of Darwinism. Huxley proposed a certain

method in photographing the black male subject that is evident in the imagery discussed in this chapter. Through the use of ethnographic photographic conventions in some of the images, the examples illustrated in figures 2, 3, 4, 8 and 9 in this text were mainly due to the stereotypical view that black subjects were regarded as a racial stereotype to be seen and measured like a specimen (Pultz, 1995:23).

The notion of Africa as the ‘Dark Continent’ and the culture of the black male subject as ‘uncivilised’, ‘fixed’ and ‘static’ is reinforced in Hugo’s images. The continent was often metaphorically described along these lines as a woman. One of the predecessors of documentary photography was colonial ethnographic photography of the late 19th and early 20th century. Its job was to record the lifestyles of the colonised people. The photographs were part of the problematic language that showed the colonisers the ‘primitive’ practices of the colonised (Waller, 2000:199). The images create a perception of Africa and the Nigerian entertainers as ‘primitive’ because they roam the streets with wild animals. In the process of exposing these misconceptions about the character of the black subject, the artist inadvertently perpetuates a colonial construction of the black subject, as read in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899). The stereotypical personification of representations that drew on the long pictorial tradition in which the four continents of Africa, North and South America and Asia were represented as women now generated images of America or Africa that positioned these continents as available for plunder, possession, discovery and conquest. Conversely, native women and their bodies are described in terms of the promise and the fear of the colonial land, as in the much later description of a “wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman” whom the narrator in Conrad’s book encounters on the shores of the Congo River: She was “savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent....” (Conrad cited in Loomba, 1998:151).

The critique is to show the construct of photography and of such images that dominated the visual discourse of the colonial era. This visual language is still utilised in contemporary art to highlight the existing tensions of the postcolonial and colonial eras (Enwezor, 1997:25). The issue is further discussed in the article ‘Reframing the black subject: Ideology and fantasy in contemporary South African representation’ by Okwui Enwezor (1997). Enwezor’s criticism is of the manner in which the non-black artist imposes his or her own preconceived notions on the black subject. Enwezor cites two examples in his criticism: the Ghost series in Candice Breitz’s works and the exhibition *Miscast* at the South African National Gallery by Pippa Skotnes. The problem is in the use of stereotypical colonial visual devices by Hugo in

the attempt to expose the myths about the subject he represents. Hugo inadvertently perpetuates the stereotypical visual discourses that dominate representation of the black male subject. One has to consider the fact that Pieter Hugo is working within the gallery and magazine context and that his work is created with the intent to entertain the viewer. At the same time these images are meant to be used as a means to shed light on the stereotypical representations often associated with black subjects. The notion of the photograph as being representative of the subjects that it portrays is problematic as they are depicted as racial types and not as individuals with a shared history. Although this is not the artist's imagined direction, the manner in which the work is created and presented is problematic when it comes to the two examples mentioned. This supports my argument that colonial visual discourses are still in use in contemporary art when it comes to visual representations of the black body.

The assumption that the artist is an agent of his or her community and that his or her work is determined by his or her religious or cultural background is significant for practising artists, for it dictates how the artwork is consumed and how consequently it is considered in the art world. The black male subject as spectacle is emphasised here to portray a stereotypical image of the character of the black man as 'hypersexual' animal or in this case as 'flawed' (Read, 1996:64). In the examples mentioned above, this is the case.

The discourses pushed forward by art and other public institutions are problematical, as seen in the criticism by Enwezor (1997) of two South African women artists, Candice Breitz and Pippa Skotnes, during their exhibitions on the black subject, although there are countless other artists who critically examine the issue of representation in a manner that is inclusive of postcolonial critique and discourses. Black artists such as South African photographer Zwelethu Mthethwa, British Nigerian-born photographer Rotimi Fani-Kayode and performance photographer American Lyle Ashton Harris during their era had difficulties in depicting the black subject in an imaginative manner in opposition to the dominant expectations of a spectacle. The problem with the kind of challenges that black artists face is that they are seen as representatives of their communities and are obligated to conform to societal politics (Gilroy, 1996:84). The societal politics of representation is a strong marker of the racial construct of gender and sexuality along biological lines. Race becomes a means of access and determines how the work of an artist is consumed. The black subject is under the spotlight of the white male and female myth (Maxwell, 2000:33). Figure 9 and also

Figure 8 play on this notion of the ‘savage’ and ‘primitive’ native that forms part of the myth of the white man.

I am aware of the discourses of representation and of being seen as an agent of the black communities. The burden of contemporary South African photography is to dispel stereotypes that expose the existing tensions created by the politics of race, gender and sexuality. The construct of photography reveals that certain racist visual devices when applied to the representation of the black body serve as a mechanism or instrument of colonialist discourse. This has proven to be detrimental to the representation of the black body in contemporary South African photography. Postcolonial theory has aided in constructing black sexuality in a manner that perceives it as not ‘abnormal’ or ‘hypersexual’. The discourse on representations of black sexuality in South African photography has shifted from the colonial visual devices often relying on stereotypical views of the black subject. The applying of strategies and visual mechanisms to reinforce positive affirmations of black sexuality has meant that perceptions of the black body have shifted from the ‘wild man’ to the ‘noble savage’. The construction of black sexuality as ‘animalistic’ served to reinforce the stereotypical view of the black body as something to be feared. In investigating the illustrated imagery often used to define the sexuality of the black man, one finds that there is a failure by some photographers to position the black body in a manner that is perhaps seen as a ‘fair’ portrayal of the ‘reality’ of the black man. Throughout the representation of black sexuality as ‘animalistic’ and ‘threatening’, I have continued to argue in this chapter that the visual devices of colonial discourse continue to influence representations of black men. The re-creation of the problematic discourses only served to undermine the independence and the individuality of the black subject. The stereotypical perception that dominates visual discourse on black subjects is still informed by the scientific means of photography as an instrument to capture the so called ‘reality’ of its subjects.

Chapter 2

Imaginative acts of self-representation as a critical alternative to colonial photographic practices in contemporary art

‘Imaginative representation of the self’ is a term used by Rotimi Fani-Kayode to refer to the appropriation of colonial imagery for the creation of images that take into account “the ritual transformation of imagery of the black body” (Fani-Kayode, 1996:6). This is achieved by the artist’s utilising constructive means of self-representation as a means of creating alternative forms of imaginative representation of the black body. Imaginative self-representation is a mechanism used by artists such as Lyle Ashton Harris and myself to question and critique the existing visual representations of the black subject in photography. The concept of blackness becomes a critique in which alternate means of representation are created. In creating works of art that are imaginative representations of the black male subject, I do not claim to be speaking on behalf of the black community. My work examines racial and gendered visual devices from my perspective as a young Xhosa man. I critique the continued influence of colonial discourse in images depicting the black male subject. These images most often reinforce stereotypical views of black male sexuality or what hooks refers to as “static and fixed” culture (1992:62). The fascination with sexuality is mainly due to the lack of knowledge in looking at issues of sexuality and specifically racial and gendered representations of the black male subject by some photographers.

In the case of the artists mentioned in this chapter, photography serves to reconstruct the gendered representations that aim to question black male sexuality and blackness. The performative in contemporary photographic art practices features prominently among black artists from South Africa and the diaspora. Lyle Ashton Harris and Rotimi Fani-Kayode make use of performativity, unlike Zwelethu Mthethwa’s portrait photographs. My interest lies in revealing the performativity of posing for the camera and assuming a character role that destabilises gender boundaries. The staging of the photograph suggests the construct nature of gender and sexuality; by this I mean the use of performativity as a mechanism to achieve this destabilisation of heterosexual norms. The manners in which the images are constructed by the artist are evidence of the nature of photographic practice used as constructs to shape and create alternative forms of representation. Sexuality becomes a construct through the process of appropriation and the subversive application of stereotypical colonial representations of the black subject. Zwelethu Mthethwa, Harris and Fani-Kayode critique

these ethnographic visual conventions through their use of colonial visual devices, which they in turn subvert by exposing the existing discourses that serve to control the black male body.

The transformation of the idea of the autobiographical by non-white artists was a means to shape and destabilise the dominant racist grand narratives that sought to re-create the colonial agenda of imperialism through the regulation and control of the black body (Harris & Harris, 1998:249). In order to understand the dynamics of racial representation, one has to know the historical context out of which it emerges. The framing of the black male subject as 'primitive' and also as a base form of humanity in photographs of the South African black male subject throughout the colonial discourse furthered the system of domination. This can be seen in the ethnographic images of German photographer Gustav Theodor Fritsch's portraits of South African indigenous people. The images were a scientific study of the native tribes of southern Africa, and their purpose was to create a false perception that colonised people were 'barbaric' and in need of clothing, which was a sign of 'civilisation' and 'progress' (Cooper, 1990:55). The continued exploitation of the black male subject for economic and labour purposes by oppressing him resurfaces in examples of documentary photographer Steve Hilton-Barber's practices (Enwezor, 1997:25). Imaginative self-representation of the black male subject differs from straight reportage in that the subject of the photographs has, to some extent, control over the creation of his or her reality. The perceived lack of impartiality by some of the artists mentioned in this thesis exposes some of the racist formulaic flaws applied in the construction of black sexuality. Furthermore, elements of stereotypical representation and race are regarded as the main factors in reinforcing differences in sexuality and gender. In looking at the evidence of how conventions of colonial photographs manifest in contemporary visual discourse, one sees a deviation from stereotypical examples that imaginative representation of the self looks to transform, when looking at the unpleasant differences reinforced by colonial visual practices.

My photographic practice and Rotimi Fani-Kayode's photographs, for example, make use of an imaginative way of representing the black male subject by referring to the primordial themes of my Xhosa background and Fani-Kayode's Yoruba background (Fani-Kayode, 1996:7). The discourse of binaries, such as savage/master, culture/nature, primitive/civilised, dominates postcolonial discourses when it comes to issues of representation, as I have argued in the previous chapter (Harris & Harris, 1998:260). Imaginative self-representation seeks to transform these dualities.

American associate professor in English Mark A. Reid suggests that because

Rotimi Fani-Kayode's work escapes recognition in Nigeria his photographs are living spirits in search of their Yoruba roots – imagined and real. His black male nudes dramatize the uncertainty of where his Nigerian self ends and where his exiled western self begins. It is not Fani-Kayode's fault that his photographs are incomplete fragments warring for some sense of wholeness in which a Diaspora Yoruba culture celebrates and affirms black male sexuality in all its forms. He and his resistance are determined by the post negritude dilemma in which blacks bury certain elements of their oppression while reaffirming other aspects. Fani-Kayode's photographs alter traditional Yoruba perceptions about an inheritor of the Balogun title as well as the socio-political and familial image of the Nigerian Deputy Prime Minister of the Western State (1998:218).

Fani-Kayode recognised that he was marginalised by a cultural past that refused his gay presence. He chose not to exhibit his photographs in Nigeria, fearing that this might harm his family's social status and lower the political and religious esteem in which the Fani-Kayode patriarch was held. He felt that Nigerians would interpret his photographs as representations of the Fani-Kayode family rather than as his personal vision of black male sexuality (Reid, 1998:218).

Fani-Kayode's photographs critique and question existing visual discourses on the black male subject through two thematic concerns: sex and death (Mercer, 1997:119). He attempts to reclaim the image of the black man through questioning and encouraging the viewer to question his or her own assumptions of about the 'hyper-sexuality' of the black body. He acknowledges both the force of Western history and his ability to rediscover and revalidate his Yoruba past (Reid, 1998:222). Fani-Kayode's work focuses on the black body and it deviates from the ethnographic past that sought to create 'abnormal' imagery that aimed to repress and control the black body. The incorporation of his historical background as a gay photographer and an African living in Europe creates this alternate space where his work can transgress gender and racial boundaries. The focus on the black body and its eroticised representation and the central framing of the isolated figure in the image *Crucifixion* (1989) in Figure 11 resonate with the visual devices that formed part of the colonialist discourse. Fani-Kayode makes use of visual coding to subvert and critique the image of the black man as a racial type. He does this in the images illustrated in *Crucifixion* (1989) (Figure 11) and

Technique of ecstasy (1989) (Figure 27) by hiding the face of the subject and averting the subject's gaze, preventing the viewer from taking a dominant perspective.

According to philosopher Stuart Hall,

The faces are all 'masked'. In his most compelling erotic image, *Technique of ecstasy* and *Crucifixion* (1989), the face, concentrated in desire, is finally hidden from the viewer's gaze. Fani-Kayode 'subjectifies' the black male and black sexuality, claiming it without making it an object of contemplation and at the same time without 'personifying' it. Because the masking is not a compositional trick, but an effect drawn from another iconographical tradition, the truncation of the body condenses the visual effect, displacing it into the relation between the two figures 'at rest' with the weight, the specific gravity of concentrated sexual pleasure, without translating them into fetishes (Hall cited in Mercer, 1997:116).

The work of American photographer Robert Mapplethorpe is an example of the continuation of the depictions of the black body that often reinforces the stereotypical visual representations of the black male subject as 'animalistic'. The continued reinforcement of the idea of the 'wild man' through the use of ethnographic visual conventions and techniques such as cropping is applied in order to emphasise the black subject's well-endowed sexual organs. Another example is the use of skin and sexuality as a signifier for the forging of problematic visual discourses based on biological differences, as illustrated in *Man in a polyester suit* (1980) (Figure 10). Fani-Kayode does not put emphasis on sex or biological differences in order to highlight cultural or racial tensions in representing the black body.

Mark A. Reid (1998:220) offers this interpretation of Fani-Kayode's work:

His work presents many forms of black male sexuality and articulates a dialogical tension between historical affirmations of racial, ethnic, and sexual pride, and discourses which would deny such utterances. One must recognise that the colonial experience mutually affects the social and psychic constitution of the West. Consequently Fani-Kayode's photographs are imbued with an eroticised blackness which speaks both to Africa and the West, his images question the dehumanising gaze that objectifies the black body as unruly and warranting discipline and excision.

Rotimi Fani-Kayode was aware of Western art and the fetishisation of the black body. This is why his black male subjects are framed as whole bodies, often adorned with clothing or

props, signalling his hybrid Nigerian/gay/British colonial identities, for example *Technique of ecstasy* (1989) (Figure 27). Although Fani-Kayode and Mapplethorpe are both gay photographers who explore black male sexuality, Fani-Kayode is not obsessed with close-ups of the black penis. He resists Mapplethorpe's ambiguous vision of the black man as unthreatening and unworthy of artistic and juridical beheading, in all of its legal and extra-legal forms. One need only review Mapplethorpe's *Man in a polyester suit* (1980) (Figure 10) to appreciate the point. Fani-Kayode de-emphasises the very parts of the black body that Mapplethorpe and other white men have scientifically scrutinised, legally censored and eradicated in lynching (Reid, 1998:223). The subject is no longer the object. The effect of this mechanism is to reinforce the humane aspect of the subject in Fani-Kayode's images.

Reid suggests that

the photographer Robert Mapplethorpe's portraits often focus voyeuristically on the black male genitals. Consequently Fani-Kayode's photographs emphasise the centrality of the total black male form rather than its physical castrations (1998:220).

Fani-Kayode's nudes distance both the colonialist gaze and Mapplethorpe's white suburban fantasies (Reid, 1998:222).

According to sociologist and philosopher Stuart Hall, Fani-Kayode "subjectifies" the black male and black sexuality, claiming it, without making it an object of contemplation and at the same time without "personifying it" (Hall cited in Reid, 1998:224). Fani-Kayode provides an African place between the classical Greek nude and the African warrior. He leaves his multi-sexual, multi-gendered and multi-ethnic audience with an imaginative, illusive and slippery sensuality that frames his nudes. Such slippery and illusive qualities are not always available to artists who, like Mapplethorpe, attempt to deal with the epic narrative of black sexuality by showing it in the colonial speculum. While Mapplethorpe's black nudes focus on the phallic threat of black manhood as erotic and dangerous to the Western mind, Fani-Kayode's black nudes emphasise the humanity of the total black body as sensual and significant (Hall cited in Reid, 1998:227).

Blackness and homoerotic desire are key elements that I associate with the image mentioned in this thesis by Rotimi Fani-Kayode in *Crucifixion* (1989) (Figure 11). Fani-Kayode's image requires one to critically question the representation of the black male subject in visual discourses by acknowledging that images of black men are based on constructs of racial and

gendered representations. His use of the averted gaze serves to subvert the dominating gaze of the photographer and viewer. In Figure 11, its use denies equal footing between the photographer and the viewer, thus highlighting the unequal relationship of power. The homoerotic element of his images destabilises gender boundaries through the photographic practices that question the visual discourses of sexual identity.

Fani-Kayode's images seek to question the appropriation of racist, colonial visual devices by exposing them as constructs, for example the images by German documentary photographer Leni Reifenstahl of the Nuba from southern Sudan. In *Crucifixion (1989)* Figure 11, 'the isolated figure and the sharpness of the focus on the body' serve as a critique of the 'hyper-masculine' notion attached to black sexuality. The visual devices appropriated from imaginative self-representation such as 'lighting, pose, gesture and cropping' are all used in the construction of the black nude as an object of homoerotic desire.

Rotimi Fani-Kayode's *Crucifixion (1989)* (Figure 11 offers an alternative to the depiction of black male sexuality as 'savage' and 'overactive' (Fani-Kayode, 1996:6). A subtle homoerotic interplay is visible in the images. In Figure 11, "The black body, as a point of focus, is a site where meanings collide and differences are forged", according to sociologist and philosopher Stuart Hall (cited in Mercer, 1997:115), who further suggests that

the black body (in Rotimi Fani-Kayode's images *Crucifixion* and *Technique of ecstasy (1989)*) is the locus for intersecting planes of meaning. His images become both the creative "master or shaman" and the subject that seeks to transcend to the realm of the spiritual through the process of capturing a moment of "sexual ecstasy" (Hall cited in Mercer, 1997:115).

In Fani-Kayode's images this ritual transformation of the black body through imaginative self-representations is achieved through an affinity with his Yoruba background.

According to Fani-Kayode,

In African traditional art, the mask does not represent a material reality: rather, the artist strives to approach a spiritual reality in it through images suggested by human and animal forms. I think photography can aspire to the same imaginative interpretations of life. My reality is not the same as that which is often presented to us in western photographs. As an African working in a western medium, I try to bring out the spiritual dimension in my pictures so that concepts of reality become

ambiguous and are opened to interpretation. This requires what Yoruba priests and artists call a Technique of ecstasy (Fani-Kayode, 1996:6).

The historical reference to his background projects a spiritual quality, just like “African artists’ use of the mask in African traditional art to strive for a spiritual reality suggested by human and animal forms” (Fani-Kayode, 1996:6). The body in the work of Fani-Kayode is a vessel of desire and inspiration that transcends gender boundaries. In Fani-Kayode’s *Crucifixion (1989)* (Figure 11), the similar pose is a biblical reference to the crucifixion of Christ that suggests the spiritual element in African culture (Mercer, 1997:117). The cultural significance in these images is aimed at playing on the idea of the black male subject as a ‘noble savage’ in need of civilising. In this example, Fani-Kayode subverts the idea of the ‘unpredictable’ and ‘dangerous’ black man. The dissolution of stereotypical boundaries and fear of black sexuality is something that is evident in the works mentioned in this chapter.

Documentary photography differs from imaginative self-representation in its aspirations toward an objective ‘truth’. Unlike documentary photography, imaginative self-representation seeks to represent the black male subject by subverting racist visual discourses that dominate it. An important point to make is that unlike imaginative self-representation, documentary photography re-appropriates the colonial visual devices in order to emphasise the differences between black and white subjects. Documentary photography is influenced mostly by the ideals of power and knowledge that serve to denigrate the black subject. Another problem of the representation of the black subject in documentary photography is that documentary photography often distorts the reality of its subjects. The shift in focus from sexuality to race in discussing photographs of the black body shows how easily one can become side-tracked into looking at biological differences. For example, Steve Hilton-Barber’s images of the Basotho initiates are about a sacred ritual of masculinity, and they are turned into being about a white photographer taking images of young black initiates on his father’s farm in Tzaneen (Waller, 2000:197).

The progression of racist visual techniques that dominates contemporary visual discourse just highlights the problematical discourse of how colonialism reinserts itself through the appropriation of visual devices of ethnographic practices. When looking at how documentary photographic practices represent the black body, the focus is often on documenting the rituals of dying cultures such as tribes in the sub-Saharan region that are becoming extinct. In postcolonial South African photography, the struggle against apartheid was the key thematic

focus during the period of political and cultural liberation in South African art (Enwezor, 1997:31). The continued tradition of documentary photography assumes the accuracy of the photograph that provides knowledge. Some documentary photographers continue to perpetuate these belief systems despite concerns that a photograph is interpretive rather than a document or a description (Rosen, 1992:4). Such an argument holds that in this way, even progressive documentary photographers align themselves with a power structure developed alongside colonialism that carries out an important function of colonialism: to control knowledge about the appropriated peoples (Rosen, 1992:5). This is a problem considering the manner in which black men and women have been represented in colonial and contemporary imagery, as is the case with Duggan-Cronin's, Hilton-Barber's and Hugo's images. Their continued use of inherited problematic ethnographic visual devices and practices such as cropping of the image and framing of their subject in 'idyllic' ethnographic scenes influences contemporary photographic practice negatively.

In looking at the differences between documentary photography and imaginative self-representation, one finds that there is first the defining of the two roles. The role of the artist versus that of the photographer is significant when comparing imaginative self-representation to documentary photography. There is the romantic notion that documentary photographers are 'autonomous individuals' bringing forth knowledge of the subjects and the African landscape (Rosen, 1992:7). The scientific status given to the photographer assumes that the photographer is the 'truth' seeker observing the 'other' from an objective perspective (hooks, 1992:171). This is the Enlightenment position that is often applied in contemporary photography, such as the lighting and framing of the black subject. The accurate visual record of life in the colonies and of its indigenous colonised people was significant to the people of Europe. The 'truth' about the nature of the colonised people's sexuality through photographs in this instance was regarded as equivalent to empiricism (Bright, 2010:11). This resulted in myths and stereotypes often based on fear of the unknown black sexuality that defined the black body as 'abnormal' and 'hypersexual'.

Imaginative self-representation seeks the likeness of representation of blackness through applying visual devices such as the averted gaze and framing the whole black body and not just focusing on exaggerating certain body parts. This means that certain accepted visual conventions such as the 'abnormality' of the black body are subverted through the visual art codes that seek to critique certain representations of the black body. The subversion and critiquing of these conventions and ethnographic visual devices aim to demystify black

sexuality and identity. Through the use of alternative ways of representing the black male subject, the artists mentioned in this thesis re-appropriate such images and transform them into imaginative representations of their own. The act of transforming such blatantly racist images seeks to dissolve boundaries that divide black and white people by taking a critical stance on how the black body is photographed. This means that imagery of the black subject is “transformed ritualistically into images of our own creation” as black photographers through self-representation (Fani-Kayode, 1996:6).

Imaginative acts of the self are performed as a critical response to the way in which sexuality and gender are constructed through representations. Photography is a site where identities are forged and biological, cultural and religious differences are etched out. The sexuality of the black subject has over the years been defined in terms of colonial discourses that put emphasis on biological, cultural and religious differences. Portrait photography was seen by colonised peoples as an instrument to show that they also had mastered the social characteristics of behaviour and that in some ways they had recovered their pride and dignity. The status of the subject in the photographs was seen to be a sign of the assimilation and appropriation of Western culture and ideals by the subject (Maxwell, 2000:13).

The self-portrait has been understood as a representation of emotions, an onward expression of inner feelings, a penetrating self-analysis and self-contemplation that might bestow an immortality of sorts upon the artist. The approaches to understanding the self in self-portraits have been understood in humanist terms as indicating something inherent and nameable and by extension a stable universal subject (Bright, 2010:8).

Postmodernist theory outlined the self as something more indexical, as a reflexive condition of concepts, which leads to the belief that there is no ‘true’ self. If we follow this idea to its logical conclusion, the self-splits, merges, fractures and becomes so performed and so constructed that nothing authentic remains; it becomes ‘every’ person or no person, and ultimately a true self is nothing more than a fabrication or a void (Bright, 2010:9).

When certain ethnographic visual conventions are put in use, they become nothing more than a mere interpretation of the photographer’s reality imposed upon his or her subjects (Waller, 2000:190). The portraits of South African indigenous tribes by Gustav Theodor Fritsch serve as an example.

It is important that the works used as examples in this thesis be seen as visual examples that seek to inform my photographic practices. I investigate the politics of representation with images of the self. In the process of revealing the cultural constructs of sexuality, there is also the concealing of racist visual devices that serve to represent the black body in an unflattering manner. The emphasis on the notion of the imaginative self-representation of the black male subject is employed in my work and that of American photographer Lyle Ashton-Harris. The autobiographical nature of the works mentioned in this chapter lends itself to the imaginative self-representation of the black body. Harris and I use the self to question the representation of blackness and black identity. The black body becomes the locus for contesting racist visual discourses that dominate the manner in which the black subject is represented. The theatricality evident in *Ude and Lyle* (2006) (Figure 13) and the series of illustrations *Untitled* (2010) (figures 14–19) reference colonially established discourses of domination. The aim is to locate the representation of the black subject in an affirming light. The self is a site of contestations of blackness and the construct of black identity.

In Harris's work and my own, the subject/object positions are all performed by the artist. The occupancy of the active position of artist/photographer and the passive position of object/model functions to produce different subject positions. The mastering look of the photographer and the voyeuristic look of the viewer form part of the active act of looking, which occupies a masculine position. These looks and subject positions are understood as gendered (Solomon-Godeau, 1991:244).

Harris appropriates theatrical elements that subvert the dominant representation of the black subject. The theatricality of the illustrations in *Ude and Lyle* (2006) (Figure 13) suggests the association of sexuality with performativity. The most common example of sexual performativity is the performance of drag, whereby sexuality is constructed through the reiteration of gender norms (Butler, 1993:278). The black-and-white image of Figure 13 is of a male and a female figure standing in an upright position close to each other. Their facial expressions are like a blank canvas because of the white masks. Ude and Lyle's painted faces subvert the stereotype of the minstrel that was used throughout the theatrical performances by white actors in representing African Americans during the early 19th century. Perhaps the most striking feature of the image is the nakedness of the two subjects. It points to the 'natural' state of black sexuality and debunks the fear of the black body in its 'natural' naked state. The theatricality of the image employs some of the racist visual devices that were applied in representing the black man as an animal (Harris, 1998:249). The visual device that

is applied by Harris in this case is the cropping of the image from the waist up. Ude leans over a bit while her right breast protrudes, and the defiant gaze by her and Lyle Harris disables the power of the viewer's gaze. The painted faces and the performance in front of the camera all form part of a theatrical construct of gender and sexuality. The direct stare from *Ude and Lyle* acts to disable the dominant gaze, thereby establishing subjectivity and granting equal footing between the subject and the photographer (Harris & Harris, 1998:250). In Figure 13, the straight gaze that the subjects adopt defies representation of black male sexuality as submissive and a racial stereotype. The exposed naked torsos of the two figures subvert the colonial discourse of the imagery of the black body as 'effeminate', 'hyper-masculine' and 'abnormal'. Through the act of performance, the self becomes a stage for fantasies of the black body.

The visual devices of nudity and nakedness become a visual mechanism used to question the visual representation of black male sexuality. Through the act of subjecting themselves to the colonial visual discourses, the artists mentioned in this chapter assume a passive role in their photographs, often associated with the colonial subject (Bright, 2010:63). The submissive gesture and nudity in my photographs are the result of the act of performing a passive role. My aim is to subvert the image of the black man as an 'untouched eternal child of nature' with 'bestial' qualities. The binaries of nature/culture, naked/clothed and master/slave are part of the problematic discourse of representation (Harris & Harris, 1998:260). The system of domination of the black body for labour purposes is emphasised through the use of the black body as an instrument to deconstruct black male sexuality. The vulnerability of the subject exposes the subject to the viewer's dominant gaze. The passivity of the subject is seen as a marker of resignation and also of the submissive role played by the black man.

The most important element of the assumption of the passive role by the subject or model (feminine role) is that it is counter-posed by the fact that the artist is also a creative individual that assumes the role of photographer (masculine role), which is the active role (Solomon-Godeau, 1991:244). In bell hooks' book *Black looks: Race and representation*, she asks us to embrace and acknowledge blackness through first loving the self (1992: introduction). The visual devices that my images make use of seek to embrace blackness as a means of destabilising racial and gendered differences. The use of the black body is aimed at showing appreciation and changing attitudes towards thinking about blackness. In the pursuit of a fair portrayal of the black body, one has to first acknowledge the extensive reportage by non-white artists in shaping the views and perceptions of those that are ignorant.

The use of alternate means of self-representation by some of the artists mentioned in this chapter serves as a visual device of dissolving the racist assumptions that aim to regulate and control the black body. The transforming of such images means that one has to employ the devices of performativity. As a result of this, imaginative self-representation serves as an alternate means of the production of the black body.

Chapter 3

Photographic practices of sexuality as a construct of the performance of the self through gender performativity

American philosopher J.L. Austin first coined the term 'performativity'. Whereas for Austin there is always an 'I' pronouncing the speech act, for Judith Butler performativity is "the power of discourse to produce effects through reiteration"(1997:3). According to Austin, to know what makes the force of an utterance effective and what establishes its performative character, one must first locate the utterance within a "total speech situation" (1997:3). Austin distinguishes "illocutionary" from "perlocutionary" speech acts in order to decide how best to delimit that totality. The former are speech acts that in saying do what they say and do it in the moment of that saying. The illocutionary speech act is itself the deed that it affects. Perlocutionary speech acts produce certain effects as their consequence by saying something; a certain effect follows or merely leads to certain effects that are not the same as the speech act itself (Austin in Butler, 1997:3).

Feminist theorist Judith Butler is explicit on the point that

where there is an 'I' who utters or speaks and thereby produces an effect in discourse, there is first a discourse which precedes and enables that 'I' and forms in language the constraining trajectory of its will. Thus there is no 'I' who stands behind discourse and executes its volition or will through discourse. On the contrary, the 'I' only comes into being through being called, named, interpellated, to use the Althusserian term and this discursive constitution takes place prior to the 'I' (1993:225).

What is important is that, it is the power of discourse to produce effects, or that which it names is linked with the question of performativity, then the performative is one domain in which power acts as discourse (Butler, 1993:225).

Whereas performance might imply a moment of agency, this agency is always already constituted and determined by the discursive power that precedes and surrounds it (Van der Watt, 2004:3). Performativity is a reiteration of a norm that requires an act like an utterance in the present. Performative acts are forms of authoritative speech; most performatives, for instance, are statements that in the uttering also perform a certain action and exercise a

binding power (Butler, 1993:225). Performatives tend to include legal sentences, baptisms, inaugurations and declarations of ownership, statements that not only perform an action but also confer a binding power on the action performed (Butler, 1993:225).

According to Judith Butler, a feminist theorist who critiques gender and sexuality from a position that challenges the fixity of sexual identity, we need to distinguish between performativity and performance in order to understand the complexities of gender and sexuality.

Gender certainly is a performance more like a crafted presentation of a persona than like the performance of an actor playing It is not a role that is easily discarded, or even easily taken on, though it is heavily regulated. It accrues gradually, yet does not attach itself to some blank, some actor cast in a play she's not yet read; it comes into being by virtue of being performed (Butler cited in Solomon 1998:267).

Butler further argues in *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity* (1990) that "gender is not a performance that a prior subject elects to do, but gender is performative in the sense that it constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears to express" (Butler cited in Solomon, 1998:267) .

In 'Critically queer', the last chapter of her book *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of "sex"* (1993), Judith Butler argues that "the reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake" (Butler cited in Van der Watt, 2004:3). Butler argues in the text mentioned above that gender rather than being merely constructed is performative, that it inevitably unfolds as a series of 'performed' operations that render complex meanings about the normative standards that we cannot escape, the choices we make and the means by which we represent both (Berger M, Wallis B & Watson, S 1995:3).

The premise of the feminist movement was to question the hegemonic heterosexual ideals of gender and sexuality that persist even today. The notion of a gender construct originated with the feminist movement. This construction of gender and sexuality was developed through the arts as a mechanism to investigate issues related to sexuality and gender. Within the ideological structure of a patriarchal culture, heterosexual masculinity has traditionally been structured as the normative gender. Rather than simply seeking to overthrow this standard or focusing on the social determinants of sexual difference, many feminists have challenged the fixity of all subject positions. This approach has emphasised the multiplicity of identity, the

ways in which gender is articulated through a variety of positions, languages, institutions and apparatuses. This position maintains that gender is constructed; that is, who we are is shaped by historical circumstances and social discourses and not primarily by random biology. Gender roles, the subject positions we occupy in society, are constructed from a complex web of influences; some of these effects we control, others we do not (Berger M, et al., 1995:2).

The construction of the sexuality of the black male subject as effeminate during and after the colonial period is a point of contestation and continues to plague gendered representations in South African contemporary photography. This is evident in the continued debate over the sexual and gendered identity of the black subject in South African photography. The feminist approach to issues of gender and sexuality often questions the ways in which these constructs of sexuality are formed and eventually determine how the black male subject is seen through feminist visual devices such as theatricality, drag performances and subversion of gender roles.

The formation of gender differences in language through the creation of the masculine and the feminine categories that are defined by and eventually ingrained in language most often produces a rigid and fictive construction of reality (Berger M, et al., 1995:3). Such false stabilisations of gender inscribe onto the masculine and feminine a coherent and ultimately coercive sexuality in which the sexes are understood to be static, rigid and fixed, which mirrors the flat, nearly oppositional roles of a compulsory, socially sanctioned heterosexuality (Berger et al., 1995:4). But the social and cultural construction of the masculine and feminine is never so inevitable and unitary. For one, the gender discontinuities that influence hetero-, bi-, gay and lesbian sexuality do not conform to a simple binary opposition between men and women. The formations of gay and lesbian sexuality, for example, are not necessarily drawn around the boundaries of gender at all, an idea exemplified by bull dykes who dress like men or drag queens who masquerade as women. Hence, this regulatory ideal is no more than a “norm and a fiction that disguises itself as a developmental law regulating the sexual field that it purports to describe” (Berger M, et al., 1995:4).

American photographer Lyle Ashton Harris and South African photographer Zanele Muholi incorporate some of the subversive visual devices in order to critically assess the positioning of the black body in photographic practices. Sexuality is a construct through the act of performance and appropriation of visual devices such as drag, theatricality and mimicry that

seeks to define the sexuality of the black man. These problematic and stereotypical norms are critiqued through the photographic practices mentioned in this thesis, for example Gustav Theodor Fritsch's South African portraits. The feminist approach to understanding the dynamics of sexuality as a construct lies in the acknowledgement of the visual devices used to locate gendered representations (Solomon-Godeau, 1991: xxviii).

Judith Butler explains this appropriation of gender conventions by using the example of women and men who are condemned to conform to binary sexual differences that appear to be inevitable, even natural. As such, the naming of sex is “an act of domination and compulsion” – a means of forcing us to accept the idea of the masculine and the feminine as an inevitable binary opposition (cited in Berger M, et al 1995: 3).

Judith Butler further observes that ‘gender identity can act as a coercive ideal that exists principally to protect the norm of heterosexuality. It is in this sense, then, that gender, rather than being static and reactive, is inevitably performative, eventually unfolding as a complex enactment of self-representation and self-definition’.

Gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performativity produced and compelled by the regulatory practice of gender coherence.... In this sense gender proves to be a performance and according to Butler it is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed (Butler, 1990:25).

It is important not to substitute performance with performativity because the “performance consist in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer’s ‘will’ or ‘choice’...” (Butler, 1993:234).

Therefore gender cannot be understood as a role which either expresses or disguises an interior “self” whether that “self” is conceived as sexed or not. It as performance which is performative, gender is an “act” broadly construed, which constructs the social fiction of its own psychological interiority (Butler cited in Solomon, 1998:267).

From the reading of performativity offered by Judith Butler mentioned above, it becomes clear that performativity is distinct from performance in the sense that the latter is subsumed – ‘preceded, constrained and exceeded’ – by the former.

American photographer Lyle Ashton Harris considers sexuality from a feminist perspective. The artist assumes a passive role by imitating and exaggerating the black male role through a performance in drag, as seen in *Billie Holiday #14* (2002) (Figure 20). The staged image of *Billie Holiday #14* is a fair portrayal of this African American jazz icon, and the drag performance in the image exposes the constructs of gender and sexuality through imitation.

According to theorists Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis and Simon Watson,

[T]he result of this “performance” may work to defy original or primary gender identities, as in the cultural practices of cross-dressing, or it may stylise butch-femme identities in order to exaggerate, play with or in a more reactionary sense, conform to socially defined notions of the masculine or the feminine (Berger et al., 1995:5).

Drag serves a subversive function to the extent that it reflects the mundane impersonations by which the ideal genders of heterosexuality are performed and naturalised and undermines their power by virtue of affecting that exposure (Butler, 1993: 231).

The appropriation and mimicry of Western principles and ethnographic photographic conventions is often considered proof of the subject’s assimilation, and as a result the subject is recognised as a ‘civilised citizen’ (Maxwell, 2000:4). The close-up side profile shot of *Billie Holiday #14* (2002) in Figure 20 and the centred isolated figure against a black backdrop, the frontal pose and the gesture of the subject in *Ude and Lyle* (2006) (Figure 13) all form part of the visual devices that serve to define the sexuality of the black man by focusing on the exaggerated differences. These differences are, for example, highlighted by the enhanced focus on the physiognomic features such as the mouth, nose and ears and also the sexual organs that are frequently emphasised. These devices are ways of reinforcing the fear of black sexuality. Although the gaze of the subject in Figure 20 is averted, it is nevertheless assumed that the gaze is a masculine one (a dominating gaze). The theatricality of the images forms part of the process of destabilising gender norms by taking on the assumption that subverts sexual differences. Through using a drag performance in Figure 20, the artist inadvertently plays with racial stereotypes such as the black man as ‘phallic object’ or ‘hyper-masculine sexuality’ (Bhabha, 1999:370).

The relation between drag performances and gender performativity in *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity* by Butler goes something like this:

When it is a man performing drag as a woman, the “imitation” that drag is said to be taken as an “imitation” of femininity, where the “femininity” that is imitated is not understood as being an imitation at all. And yet, if one considers that gender is acquired, that is assumed in relation to ideals that are never quite inhabited by anyone, and then femininity is an ideal which everyone always and only “imitates”. Thus, drag imitates the imitative structure of gender, revealing gender itself as an imitation. However playful and attractive this formulation may have seemed at the time, it did not address the question of how it is that certain forms of disavowal and repudiation come to organise the performance of gender (Butler cited in Berger M, et al., 1995:32).

In contemporary South African art, photographer Zanele Muholi’s photographs of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, intersexual, transgender and queer community are a prime example of focus on reportage as a means of activism (Muholi, 2006:88). The personal narratives that her images capture form part of a resistance paradigm set against inequalities and oppression of gay people in South Africa. The notion of imaginative self-representation in her works applies to the series of images under the exhibition title *Indawo yami* (2009), meaning ‘my place’ or ‘my space’. In *Miss Lesbian I Amsterdam* (2009) (Figure 21), the constructed self-portrait draws its influence from the pageants held during the early 1990s as a means of embracing homosexuality by creating awareness and visibility around the issue of sexuality and gender identity. In Figure 21, Muholi presents herself as a black lesbian beauty queen. She has beautiful hair and she is wearing makeup, a tiara, a sash, silver high heels, and a red and blue bikini with stars on it. The backdrop suggests that the image is taken in an artist’s studio, and the chair in the background and the floor in the foreground make the image informal. The backdrop seems like corrugated iron and the floor has paint marks on it. The centred subject strikes a pose for the camera as if for a profile shot, and the expression on her face is serious.

In the process of being critical of gender representations of the black female subject, Zanele Muholi’s work seems unconsciously to fall into the trap of using visual devices that follow the conventions of colonialism. The performativity of sexual identity of a beauty queen in the images by Muholi is through the reiteration of gender norms. In Figure 21, the broad space that positions the viewer at a safe distance from the subject makes use of visual devices such as perspective and composition that aim at creating a hierarchal chasm between the subject and the viewer. The subject in the image becomes an object, as is the case with beauty

pageants. As a result the image repeats racial constructs of sexuality through gender and the use of colonial visual coding. The visual devices that are employed are the spatial arrangement, the isolated centred figure, the pose, the gesture and the lighting. Muholi's photographs take a critical stance towards gendered representations of the black female subject. Muholi's work may seem to utilise some of these problematic visual devices, but her purpose is being critical. The critical component in questioning gender roles of representation lies in the act of looking into such forms of visual representation and not in the exaggerated subversions of sexual differences.

The intent on the discussion of performativity according to Butler went as far like this:

I argued that gender was performative, and by that I meant that there is no gender that is "expressed" by actions, gestures, speech, but that the performance of gender was precisely that which produced retroactively the illusion that there was an inner gender core. Indeed, the performance of gender might be said to retroactively to produce the effect of some true or abiding feminine essence or disposition, such that one could not use an expressive model for thinking about gender. Moreover, I argued that gender is produced as a ritualised repetition of conventions, and that this ritual is socially compelled in part by the force of a compulsory heterosexuality. I used the example of the drag performance to illustrate what I meant, and the subsequent reception of my work unfortunately took that example to be exemplary of what I meant by performativity. In this context, I would like to return to the question of drag to explain in more clear terms how I understand psychoanalysis to be linked with gender performativity, and how I take performativity to be linked with melancholia (Butler cited in Berger M, et al., 1995:31).

Butler further states, "Gender is neither purely a psychic truth conceived as hidden and internal nor is it reducible to a surface appearance" (1993:234).

This idea of a subject who has agency – a choosing or what Butler has called "humanist" subject – is exactly what her theory of performativity wants to eradicate. In *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of "sex"*, Butler explains that "performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act', but rather as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (1993:2). Gender performativity is never a voluntary, singular act but is rather an on-going, repetitive practice or process of materialisation or becoming.

One must not confuse the act of subversion of gender roles with gender being performative. Drag exaggerates gendered representations through subversions of masculinity and femininity (Butler, 1993:278). Drag destabilises gender norms and is a divisive instrument of sexual differences (235).

Zanele Muholi's images aim to reveal the gendered and racialised representations of the black body and sexuality, seeking to affirm an alternative language of representation. The tone of the homosexuality in the images by Muholi is something that is perhaps not always clear from the onset as drag. The construction of sexuality through her work defies the idea of sexual differences as either biological or cultural. Homosexuality is still associated with the notion of abnormality and sexual deviation and is thought to be inherently biological and not psychological (Muholi, 2006:86).

The perception that is created by the false racist assumptions intent on repressing the black body through visual art codes such as cropping and lighting creates tensions that seek to dominate the black man in regulating the black body. Unlike what appears to be the case in some of the visual examples, such as Mapplethorpe's *Man in a polyester suit* (1980) (Figure 10), mentioned in this thesis wherein black male sexuality is exaggerated and viewed as 'hyper-masculine', physiognomic features are not the defining element of the character of the black male subject. The visual discourses emanating from colonialist devices of domination and repression employed in Mapplethorpe's image, for example, are based upon false assumptions and misconceptions that are based on the fear of the black phallus. Drag performances and imitation are the devices that are employed by artists such as Fani-Kayode and Harris, mentioned in this chapter, to subvert and dissolve gender boundaries. Through their critical engagement with the representation of the black body, they make use of visual art codes that seek to destabilise gender norms. The sexuality of the black man is questioned and its representation is scrutinised through images that create alternatives to ethnographic imagery. For example, the use of performance in some of Muholi's works mentioned above destabilises gender boundaries through performativity. Her creation of imaginative self-representation seeks to show alternate ways of viewing the black body. Homoerotic desire is taboo in many black communities, a belief challenged through photographs by Muholi, among others. The link between her work and Pieter Hugo's work, for example, is that she challenges the dominant conventions of gender and sexuality when it comes to photographic representations of the black body. This is done in a manner that subverts the dominant discourse on sexuality, but at the same time it is an imaginative self-representation.

According to Judith Butler, heterosexual conventions appear to be the norm when defining the sexuality of the black man in photography (1993:231). Some of the artists mentioned in this thesis use the black body specifically looking at the black phallus as a device to strike fear in the hearts of those that are unknowing and ignorant. The phallus of the black man is often likened to a snake such as the black mamba. It is common to look at the sexuality of the black man in terms of exaggerated physiognomic features in order to strike fear about black sexuality. This argument goes back to the first chapter where black sexuality is defined as 'hypersexual'. The representation of the black body is described according to scientific means of classification and regulation.

The construct of gender and sexuality in imagery such as Muholi's *Miss Lesbian I Amsterdam* (2009) (Figure 21) mentioned above is based on racial stereotypes that seek to categorise and classify gay black men as subjects or specimens. The problematical ethnographic conventions that come with such visual representations of the black body often claim to be the 'reality' of the subjects in them, and this is the argument in the first chapter. In creating alternative means of representation through imagery such as Muholi's series of works mentioned above, I critique the existent dominant visual discourse. The purpose is to critically investigate the construct of racial prejudices. The imaginative representation of the black male subject is one such alternative used to critically assess the issues pertaining to the representation of the black body in an affirming manner. The mythical representation of the black body through photographic practices that reinforce racist ideological norms served to create a divide between white photographers and their black subjects. Imaginative self-representation is imagery that not only seeks likeness but also shows queer sexuality as an alternate choice to the dominant heterosexual norms.

The works of art that are used as examples in this chapter expose some of the inherent assumptions that put emphasis on racial differences. Gender performativity and imitation through drag are strategies that are employed in order to create alternate means of self-representation of the black body. These practices and strategies seek to reinforce the idea of gender and black masculinity as a complex set of attributes. The visual mechanisms and the strategies that are highlighted in the examples used in this chapter are a means of exposing the nature of sexual identity.

The construct of sexuality has been a contested terrain that not only shapes and influences black masculinity but also helps to dispose of some of the racist myths that still dominate

contemporary visual representations of the black body. Photography becomes an instrument used by artists such as Rotimi Fani-Kayode, Zanele Muholi and Lyle Ashton Harris to debunk some of the myths and stereotypes that seek to reinforce the dominant position of the white man. Strategies such as drag, mimicry and performativity are used to counter the stereotypical means of visual representation and serve to subvert the view of black masculinity as 'hypersexual' and 'savage'. The emphasis that is reinforced by these racist dominant visual discourses is on biological differences and not cultural practices. Sex is what is defined in terms of biological differences at the level of sexual organs and secondary sexual characteristics, but gender I understand as socially constructed notions of femininity and masculinity.

Chapter 4

Photographic practices by South African artists with my own work as a critical response through self-portraits

For me as a young artist and photographer, creating works of art that are a representation of my own cultural and historical background holds challenges. One such challenge is creating works of art that appear flattering and impartial to the eye. The other major challenge is working with visual art codes that seek to create works of art that are representative of my own traditional upbringing and identity. But at the same time, my Western train of thought and photographic conventions confront me. These are discussed and form part of my photographic practices that look to address the vast disruptions in visual representations of the black subject. The Western perception (I mean ethnographic visual representations) of the black body and its representation is what I deal with in my work. The conflict lies in the fact that in the process of taking photographs that seek to affirm a more positive notion about the black body, there is the Western influence that makes it impossible to look at the image without considering the negative side of the black body. The white figure in my *Untitled* (2010) series of work, for example, becomes a metaphor for the negative idea of the 'Dark Continent' and 'savages' that roam the 'wilderness', which is an abstraction of the black body. The work that I create is aimed at defining my own sexuality. I look towards the self as a means of discovering the complexities of my sexuality through self-portraits. I have been on a journey of self-discovery through creating self-portraits that seek to question the existent visual forms of representing the black man. The reason for taking on this task of investigating my own sexuality is the lack of openness and sharing of what constitutes the black man's sexuality and desires. My aspirations and desires are to acknowledge the prejudices that seek to make queer culture abnormal and to make a change in my community.

Representing the self through portrait photography and looking at sexuality as a means of representing the self-inform the work that I create. My work is informed by the photographic practices of artists from the African continent and abroad. The self is a site where I embrace blackness and sexuality as a young black man. In creating images that seek to destabilise gendered representations, I seek to use the black body to change attitudes in thinking about blackness and to affirm a more critical black role. The images in this chapter can be seen as a point of departure in looking at my own photographic practices. My work and photographic

practices are informed by looking at important issues around gender and sexuality. I question the manner in which colonial visual devices are still in use in the construction of the gendered identity of the black man in contemporary photographic practices. The whole notion of questioning the representation of the black man's sexuality seeks to destabilise the existent photographic forms of representing the black man. These forms seek to deny the many complex forms of black masculinity by repressing it.

The desire to express the body as a phallic object motivated me to create the *Lunga Kama I* and *Lunga Kama II* (2009) self-portraits (figures 22 and 23). This series of images is a diptych that is shot from below the knee and to the top of the head, with a black backdrop. The three-quarter profile shot, exhibited as two separate panels, forms part of the practice of using visual art devices that look to subvert the ethnographic visual art codes. The subversion lies in the use of the three-quarter profile shot and the decorative motif that has reference to body and facial markings. The series of images consists of self-portraits investigating the sexuality of the black subject. The motif of body decorations and facial painting forms part of the continued link with the other bodies of images in which the pills replace the paint as body decorations. The sexuality of the black man has fascinated me for some time. I was drawn in by the different discourses that represented the black man as a hyper-masculine subject and phallic object under scrutiny of the white male fantasy (Bhabha, 1999:370). For example, the notion of fear of the black phallus, the *Mandingo*, emphasises the biological differences based on physiognomic attributes (Reid, 1998:217). The rhetoric of same-sex desire is part of the ideas that influence the way in which I wanted to portray the black man as nude and not naked, as in the ethnographic images of Huxley's *Namibian girl* (1849) (Figure 24) drawing.

My work is about homosexual desire and how it is represented through photographic practices. There is a desire in each of the images to become someone different and also to be desirable, I mean in the sense of not being seen as a 'phallic object' or as an 'abnormal' body with 'bestial' qualities. In my own images in *Lunga Kama I* and *Lunga Kama II* (2009) (figures 22 and 23) and *Ze* (2010) (Figure 25), homosexuality is shown as a construct of gendered representation created by the performance of the artist in isolation. *Ze* is a sequence of four images that captures the nude body in movement. The camera is employed to regulate and control the black body in the series of images. The images are of a nude figure, and there are pink and white pills decorating the subject's body. In the first of these images, the figure looks down with the right hand patting the head. In the second image, the contorted figure leans toward the right side and the subject looks up as if in a state of trance. In the third

image, the subject is placed to the left and the image is cropped from the waist up with the arm of the subject in the foreground, decorated with white pills on it. The subject looks down, averting the dominant gaze of the viewer and this visual mechanism serves to create the dissolution of boundaries. In the last and final image, the subject is leaning to the right, clutching his ankle.

The inspiration behind these homoerotic images was a desire to investigate black male sexuality and its myths. The homoerotic desire that the images emphasise acts as a visual device aimed at deconstructing gender norms by putting the black body under the eye of the lens. It is important that the images be seen as a performativity of sexuality and not as an exaggeration of gender roles. The aim of these images is to affirm blackness by putting it under the spotlight and yet at the same time to re-create alternate means of representation of the black body. The images that I create are like seeds that spark the imagination and thinking about this topic. Looking at homoerotic desire compelled me to create the images in figures 22, 23 and 25. The idea was to immerse myself into being the object of desire and to question the representation of the black male subject in colonial and postcolonial discourses by positioning myself within that discourse.

According to Ania Loomba,

Post-colonial refers to specific groups of (oppressed or dissenting) people or (individuals within them) rather than to a location of a social order, which may include such people but is limited to them. Postcolonial theory has been precisely accused of this: it shifts the focus from locations and institutions to individuals and their subjectivities; in part the dependence of postcolonial theory upon literary, cultural criticism and upon post-structuralism is responsible for this shift (Loomba, 1998:17).

Postcolonial theory becomes a vague condition of people anywhere and everywhere, and the specificities of locale do not matter (Loomba, 1998:17).

The kinds of discourse that are seen as representative of the black male subject are usually aimed at affirming a racist stereotype, an agenda of colonialist thinking (controlling of the black man through racist visual devices). The colonialist discourse that coincides with the construction of the 'other', for example the construction of the black body as a bestial and primitive destroyer is a racist stereotype that seeks to censor and suppress the many complex

representations of black masculinity (hooks, 1992:106). Therefore, at times, discussions of ‘colonial discourse’ treat such images as the static product of a timeless opposition between ‘Western’ and ‘non-Western’ peoples and ideas (Loomba, 1998: 58).

American theorist Cornel West argues that

[t]he obsession with sex and fearfulness of black sexuality has to do with the search for stimulations and meaning in a fast-paced, market-driven culture: the fear is rooted in visceral feelings about black bodies and fuelled by dominant sexual myths of black women and men. The dominant myths draw black women and men either as threatening creatures who have the potential for sexual power over whites, or as harmless, de-sexed underlings of a white culture. Black sexuality strikes fear into the hearts of white people because whites view this deep fear as a weakness. On the one hand black sexuality among blacks simply does not include whites, nor does it make them a central point of reference. But importantly black sexuality is a taboo in some communities in South Africa partly due to the idea that it is a form of black power over which whites have little control – yet its visible most visceral of white responses, be it one of seductive obsession or downright disgust (1994:119–122).

I look to photography for ways of understanding my blackness and sharing my insights with others. This encompasses the demythologising of black sexuality through the process of promoting loving the self, specifically black sexuality. What I am against is the centuries of black self-hatred and self-contempt. The research that informs my photographic practice is aimed at destabilising gendered representations by taking a critical look at how black male sexuality has been represented through changing photographic practices. The visual devices that my images make use of seek to embrace blackness as a means of destabilising the racial and gendered differences that alienate black people from their sense of self through black love (West, 1994:124).

According to theorist Cornel West,

The devaluation and humiliation of the black body over centuries has been the aim of controlling them. The ideology of white supremacist terrorised the black body as ways of striking fear and hatred by convincing the black people that they are unworthy and their intellect is inherently underdeveloped and their culture is less civilised and their future warrants less concern than that of other peoples (1994:123).

This was achieved through creating images that reinforced the photographic representations of black sexuality as 'barbaric'. The assessing of the relations between black sexuality and the subtle interplay of homoerotic images and sensuous images is critically interrogated through my own photographic practices. The use of examples in *Lunga Kama I* and *Lunga Kama II* (2009) (figures 22 and 23) and *Ze* (2010) (Figure 25) acts to destabilise gender norms through what Cornel West calls "black love" (1994:124). The link between race relations and sexuality is that one reinforces the other. The images mentioned above seek to interrogate the sexual representation of the black man in photography by making use of imaginative self-representation. In taking a closer look at how my own photographic practice is informed by these visual discourses of the self, I also realised that I inadvertently participated in the act of creating the discourses that seek to love the black body. The camera as a result became an instrument for the regulating of the black body. This created the discourse of the black subject being under the scrutiny of a dominating gaze. As a result it made the life of the black man look like a spectacle on display, just like the ideology of the white supremacist perpetuated the hatred and fear of black sexuality.

Analysis of my photographic practices

The predominant misconceptions or myths about the black male subject that are dealt with in the images are, for example, the colonial discourse of black/white. The rage and desire that inspire me have been an integral part of my drive to overturn inherited racial beliefs that show contempt for black sexuality. The inspiration that motivates my works is the need to question the manner in which black men are represented in photographic practices. It is important to recognise the construct of black male sexuality and to question its representation in relation to current photographic practices. The theme of sexuality that runs through the examples in this thesis has shaped the manner in which I see the black body as sensuous. We should strive to look at the black body from a new perspective and not in a manner that seeks to degrade or control it. This entails employing imaginative self-representation as a strategy to affirm black sexuality and to critically interrogate this issue from a different perspective.

The visual discourses that dominate the perceptions of black people in terms of looking at their own bodies are often created to degrade black sexuality. These racist and stereotypical perceptions do not take into consideration that the categories are based on classifications of race. When it comes to my photographs, the aim is to make use of the discourses that look at the black body from a critical perspective. These include the strategy of imaginative self-

representation and the discourses that embrace black sexuality through processes of promoting self-love and not self-hatred. My photographic exploration of black sexuality intends to dispel stereotypes of black sexuality as 'animalistic' and 'barbaric'. I do not specifically look to define my own sexuality in terms of sexual constructs such as skin colour. The photographs in this thesis are examples of ways in which the black body has been represented over the years in South African art. The idea or intent of these examples is to show the shifting representations of the black body from 'savage' to 'noble savage' (Fani-Kayode, 1996:9). South African art is used as a theoretical basis for the discussion of black sexuality due to its history of repression and regulation through racist systems.

The sexuality and identity of the black man are often more or less shaped by perceptions and stereotypes aimed at exercising some form of control over the black body. This is largely due to the economic exploitation that makes use of the black body for cheap labour. In *John Addai, the wild honey collector, Techiman District, Ghana* and *Paul Ankomah, the wild honey collector, Techiman District, Ghana* (2005) (Figure 8) and *Mallam Galadima Ahmadu with Jamis, Abuja, Nigeria, The hyena and other men* (2005) (Figure 9) by Pieter Hugo, there is a use of the visual devices of colonial discourse in which the black male subject is under scrutiny of the domineering gaze of the documentary photographer. The 'isolated figure' and the connotations of the 'primitive' native are used as devices to support the idea of the 'savage' roaming the streets of Nigeria and the forests of Ghana. I am conscious of these connotations and assumptions that inform the photographing of the black male subject. Photography of the black body is often produced for a select audience such as galleries and private institutions and does not necessarily reflect the reality of rural areas. My aim and focus are to act as a voice for those on the margins who are suffering discrimination. The questioning of the inherent assumptions is aimed at putting to rest racist stereotypical representations that dominate the black body through measuring and applying categorical classification (Pultz, 1995:23).

The exhibition *Here I am* as a theoretical framework to the discussion of sexual and gendered representations

The exhibition *Here I am* was part of the Side Gallery project at the Michael Stevenson gallery in 2009 and questioned stereotypical forms of representation. The images in *Ubuntu libhongo lam* (pride in my humanity) (2009) (Figure 26) and *Lunga Kama I* and *Lunga Kama II* (2009) (figures 22 and 23) were exhibited.

In the *Ubuntu libhongo lam* triptych series Figure 26, spirituality is communicated through the use of photographic visual devices. The closed eyes and hands folded together in prayer in the first image suggest this spiritual dimension. In the second image, the subject looks down, clasping his hands as if subverting the gaze of the viewer. In the third image, the open hands suggest a reaching within the self.

There are many misconceptions and misrepresentations when it comes to images depicting the sexuality of the black man. Assumptions about the black man as ‘hypersexual’, ‘animalistic’ and ‘hyper-masculine’ are frequently accepted as the truth (Bhabha, 1999:370). For example, American photographer Robert Mapplethorpe’s *Man in a polyester suit* (1980) (Figure 10) puts emphasis on the sexual organ of the black man. The black body in such representations is depicted based on the fantasies of the white man that are projected onto the sexuality of the black man. Such racist visual representations are assumed true as they go unchallenged by the majority of black men. By creating works of art that question and pose a critique of such racist representations, I seek to destabilise the gender norms that define the black man as ‘hypersexual’ (Bhabha, 1999:370).

There exists a lack of impartiality on platforms and debates surrounding issues pertaining to black male sexuality because sexuality is still largely regarded as a taboo subject and black sexuality has been projected as a ‘dark’ and ‘abnormal’ disease. The imaginative photographic practices that form part of the process of investigating black male sexuality seek to reclaim the image of the black man by taking a critical look at how sexuality becomes a construct through stereotypical gendered representations. Ethnographic colonialist devices used to control the representation of the black man are still prevalent in South African contemporary art. These entail photographing the black body by putting emphasis on biological features such as sexual organs and physical appearance and also through cropping devices and lighting. Another dominant feature that is prevalent when photographing the black subject is the romantic and picturesque imagery that is used to describe rural life as idyllic. This has served as a model for successive generations in order to romanticise and create the perception that Africans still need to be ‘civilised’ (Godby, 2001:21).

The problem with these kinds of discriminatory representation is that they are usually racist as they suggest the ‘static’ and timeless ‘fixed’ culture of the black subject. The photographic history of the black subject is dominated by myths and stereotypical representations such as those pertaining to biological features (Bhabha, 1999:370). They are aimed at demeaning and

making the black man despise his own sexual identity, making him think that he is ‘inferior’ to his white male counterpart (Solomon-Godeau, 1991: xxxix). In looking at how the ideology of white supremacy has impacted on black people’s attitudes and self-esteem, I focus on alternative means of visual representation of the black body to affirm the image of the black body by transforming such blatant racist imagery.

I create images of black sexuality to break down the stereotypes and the myths about the character of the black man. My images seek to transcend the boundaries of gender by creating a more affirmative direction that recognises the visual devices that form part of the discourse on black sexuality. This is not necessarily a bad or a good thing, but it serves as an opportunity to create a platform for the affirmation of black sexuality and to fight against white contempt. This is something that has over the years been dealt with by political and social leaders such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, Solomon Tsekiso Plaatjie, James Baldwin, Malcom X, Aimé Césaire and Martin Luther King Junior through affirmations of black humanity.

In the *Ubuntu libhongo lam* (Figure 26) exhibition images, the subject wears only a white undergarment with a cocktail of antidepressants and silver confetti sticking to the subject’s body. These serve as adornments and are an attempt to destabilise inherent assumptions about the black man as ‘desexualised’. The images in the exhibition look at the relation between sickness and sexuality and how they manifest through my photographic practices. The view of Africa as a ‘diseased continent’ is questioned through creating images that show a likeness to the black man. The aim is to reveal the constructs of gendered representation that served to control and to create hatred of the black body through racist photographic practices with regard to black sexuality.

The images in the exhibition seek to challenge Eurocentric views on beauty and the black body, for example the perception that black people are ‘hypersexual’. The common thread in the exhibition is the self and the black body as a vehicle of the idea of blackness. The black body has a rich history of racist representation that seeks to reinforce stereotypes and to regulate the black body and the black mind (a colonialist agenda) through racist photographic devices. The markings in the images *Ubuntu libhongo lam* (Figure 26) and *Lunga Kama I* and *Lunga Kama II* (figures 22 and 23) refer to the tribal markings of an African tribe, the Xhosa. These markings are used to heal the wounds of the ideology of white supremacy that

are still etched in the souls of black people. The question now is, How does one affirm a body so despised by one's fellow citizens?

The pills that are used as a form of decorative motif in figures 26, 22 and 23 seek to draw a parallel between depression and sexuality. There is a parallel between the ingestion of medication in order to heal and ritual scarification in order to transcend into a spiritual realm. The colonialist metaphor of the black male subject as 'sick' and 'deformed' is used to counter-pose the colonialist agenda of 'alienation', similar to the way in which black gay men are marginalised in some communities by the stigma of their 'abnormal' sexuality being a 'sickness' (Fani-Kayode cited in Sealy, M and Pivin, J.L, 1997:110). My photographic practice seeks to transform those prejudices into a more affirmative image. The point of this exercise is, according to Fani-Kayode (cited in Sealy, M and Pivin, J.L, 1997:114), to "transform the imagery ritualistically into imaginative representations of life".

An assumption that being different means one is in some way defective is a discriminatory practice that dominates present perceptions of black sexuality. The pills used in figures 22 and 23 are a cocktail of antidepressants and generic medication that is used to reference the sickness of depression as well as the AIDS cocktail of antiretroviral medication. The markings that are usually seen in traditional Xhosa ceremonies are used to put emphasis on my cultural background and heritage. The black body in the images exhibited seeks to become an instrument that questions the manner in which the black body is seen by black people. The aim is to locate the white-contempt and the self-hating discourse of black sexuality and to use it to 'love' who I am inside by using my body as an instrument of making other black men take pride in their sexuality. The adopting of the pills as symbols of tribal markings seeks to establish a link with the colonial discourse of the master/slave binary, therefore making the feminist statement of "the personal is political" through my portrait photographs (Wells, 2003: introduction).

Photography of the black body places the subject under the scrutiny of the photographer's domineering gaze. The black body is somehow related to sickness as a metaphor for the 'abnormality' of its sexuality (Solomon-Godeau, 1991:221). This idea of 'abnormality' of black sexuality comes from the sciences and practices often based on Eurocentric perceptions that served to control the black body for economic exploitation. For example, the white skin was seen as the representation of the people that brought forth light and were closest to God, while black people were seen as descendants of Ham because of their dark complexion

(Loomba 1998:105). In my work the black body is affirmed as tranquil and less threatening. The creation of alternative forms (imaginative) of visual representation seeks to resolve the notion of the 'noble savage'. The subtlety of the gestures suggests a less threatening sexuality. The violent nature of colonial imagery, such as Steve Hilton-Barber's Basotho initiation photographs and Pieter Hugo's *Mallam Galadima Ahmadu with Jamis, Abuja, Nigeria, The hyena and other men* (2005) (Figure 9), of the black man's sexuality is regulated by the discourse of binaries, the 'primitive' versus the 'civilised'. My photographic practice seeks to transform the nature/culture and savage/master binaries by creating works that question the visual devices of cropping and lighting that construct the sexuality of the black man.

Untitled (2010) (figures 14–19b) is a series of images in which race is an issue that is critiqued through pin-hole photography. It frames the issue of black sexuality by looking at racial representations of the black body. The relation between the subject and the viewer is heightened by the black/white visual encoding. In the series the black positive image is presented against the white negative image. The employing of the visual devices that compare the two works against each other as binary opposites, black and white, seeks to expose the construct of such representations. The backdrop of these images is nature, and in the negative image, the white vegetation engulfs the black figure. The transforming of the images into imaginative self-representations often portrays mythical figures that are an abstraction of the black body. The black body is transformed into something that is not recognisable, and this is employing visual devices that were meant to create racist visual representations of the black body.

The ease with which I engage with the camera makes it possible for me to conduct the photographic practice on my own, allowing me a freedom of expression uninhibited by the domineering gaze of the photographer. There is also freedom from the burden of symbolic meanings that trouble the representation of the black man's body. The creation of racist visual encoding is evident in the placing of the isolated figure and in the use of nature as a backdrop. The focus centred on bushes draws the eye towards the backdrop, as seen in paintings and prints of the colonial period.

In creating alternate visual discourses of photographing the black body, one has to first acknowledge the existent visual devices. In looking at how they influence perceptions regarding the visual representations of the black body, I conclude that one has to be critical of

these racist devices in order to expose them. In looking at ethnographic and contemporary photographic representations of the black male subject, I have uncovered inherent flaws, misconceptions and stereotypical assumptions. The black male subject is often depicted as a ‘barbaric, hypersexual’ being with an ‘overactive sex drive’ (Bhabha, 1999:370). My work and practice aim to overturn these stereotypical representations, providing criticism of these practices. Contemporary South African visual representations make use of these colonial visual devices, imposing the photographer’s perception, in order to stress the differences and tensions between the black and white male subjects, thus perpetuating false assumptions and myths. Racist photographic practices are constructs of Western principles. These principles are defined in comparison with the other-encompassing black subjects that were colonised (Pultz, 1995:20).

The creating of imaginative forms of representation in my work seeks to look at the black body and its form from a critical perspective. When it comes to representations of sexuality of the black man, the use of subversive visual devices seeks to destabilise gender norms used to define the sexuality of the black man. The critical investigation into the sexuality of the black man seeks to demystify apparent factual assumptions about the sexuality of the black male subject. It is important that the works in this thesis such as *Untitled* (2010) (figures 14–19b) not be treated as a perpetuation of gender stereotypes. The aim is to facilitate understanding of gender and sexuality issues through photographic practices that transcend gender boundaries. Alternative forms of visual representation of the black subject, or what Rotimi Fani-Kayode terms “imaginative self-representation”, forge new identities (Fani-Kayode, 1996:6). The subject is now the photographer, thus dismantling the binaries of slave/master.

The photographic portraits of black subjects by some photographers/artists are always prejudiced by visual representations that seek to demean the black male subject. The criticism of the works of the artists mentioned reflects the politics of race. The focus on biological differences and stereotypical representations of the black male subject are problematic. The influence of colonial discourses still plagues contemporary South African photography through the creation of problematic imagery in order to control and regulate the many complex representations of the black body and black masculinity.

Conclusion

The photographic practices of contemporary representations of black sexuality by South African artists have created a perception that denies the black man his subjectivity as an individual. The continued tradition of photographing the black man as either 'wild man' or 'noble savage' has created many divisions and misconceptions that have led to a problematic discourse. This thesis investigated how colonial discourses of representation such as the idea of the 'noble savage' manifest in contemporary visual photographic practices with regard to the black body. In the first chapter, the focus was on the use of the colonial subject and notions often associated with it to define the sexuality of the black man. The problematic discourse that is reinforced by contemporary artists and photographers has meant that representations of the black body need to be transformed into imaginative self-representations in order to affirm black sexuality. The strategy of stereotypes often applied to reinforce ideas of control and regulation of black sexuality has failed to take into account the ritual transformation of images of black people into imaginative self-representations throughout black cultural and historical traditions. The images that are used to define black sexuality and the African idyll often refused to acknowledge the development and the assimilation of black people into urban industrialisation.

The first chapter investigated the racist ethnographic visual devices applied in the construction of black sexuality. These false assumptions and notions, such as the 'wild man' and 'noble savage', were employed to justify the imperialist domination and dehumanisation of the black subject in order to economically exploit it. The discussion on representations of the black body through photography is a means to first delineate the basis for these racist assumptions that are perceived as the 'truth' when it comes to representations of the black man. The focus was on the construction of these representations and how they shape and control views on representations of black sexuality. In Chapter I discussed the images of South African artists and documentary photographers such as Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin, Steve Hilton-Barber and Pieter Hugo as examples of the continued tradition of idyllic picturesque representations of the black body. The argument that is sustained throughout the chapter is that this tradition has created the problematic visual discourse of the 'wild man' and 'noble savage' as representation of black sexuality. The continued traditions often applied in the construction of black sexuality as threatening to white subjectivity have meant that the black body is desexualised. The examples of stereotypical representations such as the

ones mentioned above serve to create divisions that not only create racist assumptions but also look to strengthen the white supremacist ideology.

Performativity is just one of the many strategies that were used by non-white artists and photographers to affirm the gradual integration of the black subject into the Western economic system. The gradual transformation of imagery that focused on alternate means of self-representation served to oppose the white supremacist ideology of domination and economic exploitation of the black body. Imaginative self-representation is a strategy that employs alternate means of photographing the black body through subversion of the visual devices that serve to define blackness and masculinity. The strategy of imaginative self-representation and affirmation of the black body as discussed in the second chapter has created an alternate means of looking at representations of black sexuality. Nigerian-born British photographer Rotimi Fani-Kayode is an example of how non-white artists have created imagery that not only destabilised dominant conventions about black sexuality but also shaped and influenced the perceptions that changed the construction of black sexuality in an affirmative manner. The argument that is sustained in this chapter highlights the different strategies that were applied in the construction of black sexuality as less threatening. The process requires one to be critical of the dominant perceptions of the black body. The visual devices that are employed in the act are, for example, performativity and drag. The creation of alternate means of representation not only strengthens the idea of looking at queer sexuality as an alternate choice but also subverts the dominant discourse and conventions on sexuality and gender identity.

In the third chapter, sexuality and gender performativity are discussed in order to highlight the disparities of gender and sexuality. The homoerotic element is used as a means to destabilise certain gender conventions when it comes to representations of black sexuality. Drag and gender performativity are strategies that not only subvert the dominant discourse on black masculinity but also influence the approach to my photographic practices. The feminist approach that defines sexuality and gender performativity as a construct often is aimed at exposing the construct of the essentialist theory of the inner essence of gender and sexual identity. Postcolonial theory is outlined as a theoretical framework to discuss some of the problematic theory that is used to define the masculinity of the black man. The sexuality of the black subject in this chapter is defined as unthreatening and human, for example American photographer Lyle Ashton Harris's *Billie Holiday # 14* (2002) (Figure 20) and South African photographer Zanele Muholi's *Miss Lesbian 1 Amsterdam* (2009) (Figure 21).

In investigating how the influences of colonial discourse manifest itself in contemporary photographic practices, my work and photographic practices form part of the dissolution of the boundaries created by the myths and stereotypes of sexuality and gender. In employing some of the subversive visual devices such as lighting and cropping of the black subject, I subvert the dominant discourse on representation of the black subject as ‘hypersexual’.

The images that I create and make use of in this thesis use the black body and masculinity as theme. The last and final chapter of this thesis looks at how my work and practice is a platform for discussing the issues that define the black man as a stereotype, one being the fear of the *Mandingo*, the black phallus (Mercer, 1994a:80). The *Untitled (2010)* series of images (figures 14–19b) is an example of my work that deals with the issue of race when it comes to how the black body is photographed. The race issue is not the only underlying theme that is dealt with in this work of art. The other aspect is the ritual transformation of the black body into imaginative forms of self-representation. One important aspect of the transformation of racist imagery into imaginative self-representation is the use of subversive visual devices such as drag, performativity and theatricality. The different approaches and strategies by artists and photographers in dealing with the issue of black masculinity and gender highlight the complex forms of visual representations of black sexuality.

My photographic practice, as I have argued, is investigating the representation of the black subject in South African photography as a ‘noble savage’. My images defy the representations of black sexuality as ‘hypersexual’ and ‘abnormal’. There are many aspects of representation that are evident in the works of art mentioned in this thesis. One prime example is the issue of who gets to speak on behalf of the subject that is photographed. Race still proves to be a major determinant of how the black body is perceived. My argument focused on how racist assumptions regarding black men still dominate the manner in which the black body is constructed. The underlying theme in my thesis is the black body and sexuality and how black masculinity is photographed in South Africa. This thesis investigated the alternate strategies that look to define black masculinity in an unthreatening manner. The strategies used to subvert and counteract the racist visual devices that delineate gender boundaries between black and white subjects serve as a means of creating affirmation of the many complex representations of the black man. I concluded that if these problematic visual representations of the black body continued to define black masculinity, the black body and its representations would continue to be shaped by myths and stereotypes that seek to dominate and exert control over the black body. The alternate means of transforming such

racist stereotypes are just some of the means by which we must continue to expose the construct of sexuality and gender identity by affirming 'black love'.

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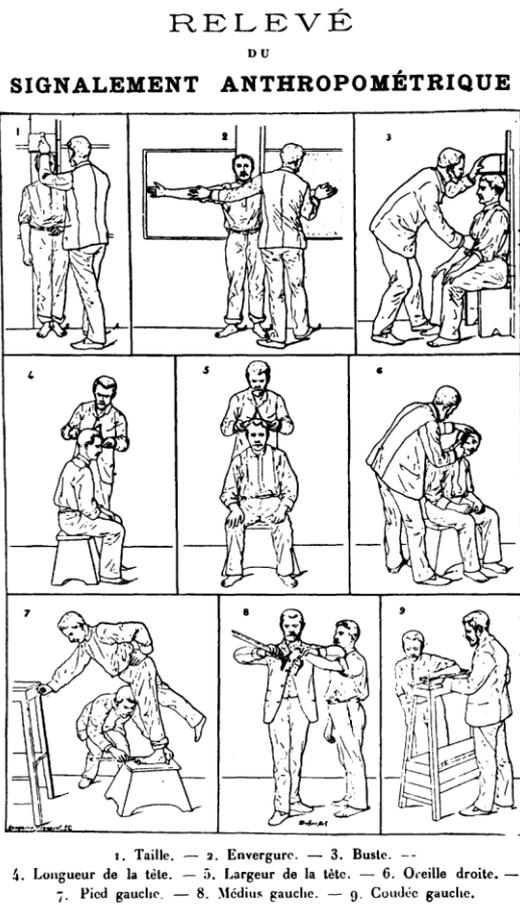


Figure 1. Alphonse Bertillon

Metric photography 1893.

Courtesy of the artist and Wikipedia.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alphonse Bertillon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alphonse_Bertillon)



Figure 2. no author.

Fingo swells/ Mfengu men. nd.

Gelatine Developing - out print.

Courtesy of the artist and Stevenson Gallery.



Figure 3. no author.

Chief Teteleku-Natal. nd.

Gelatine Developing - out print.

Courtesy of the artist and Stevenson Gallery.



Figure 4. Caney Brothers.

Ordinary fighting dress of two natives in their traditional regalia.nd.

Gelatine Developing - out print.

Courtesy of the artist and Stevenson Gallery.

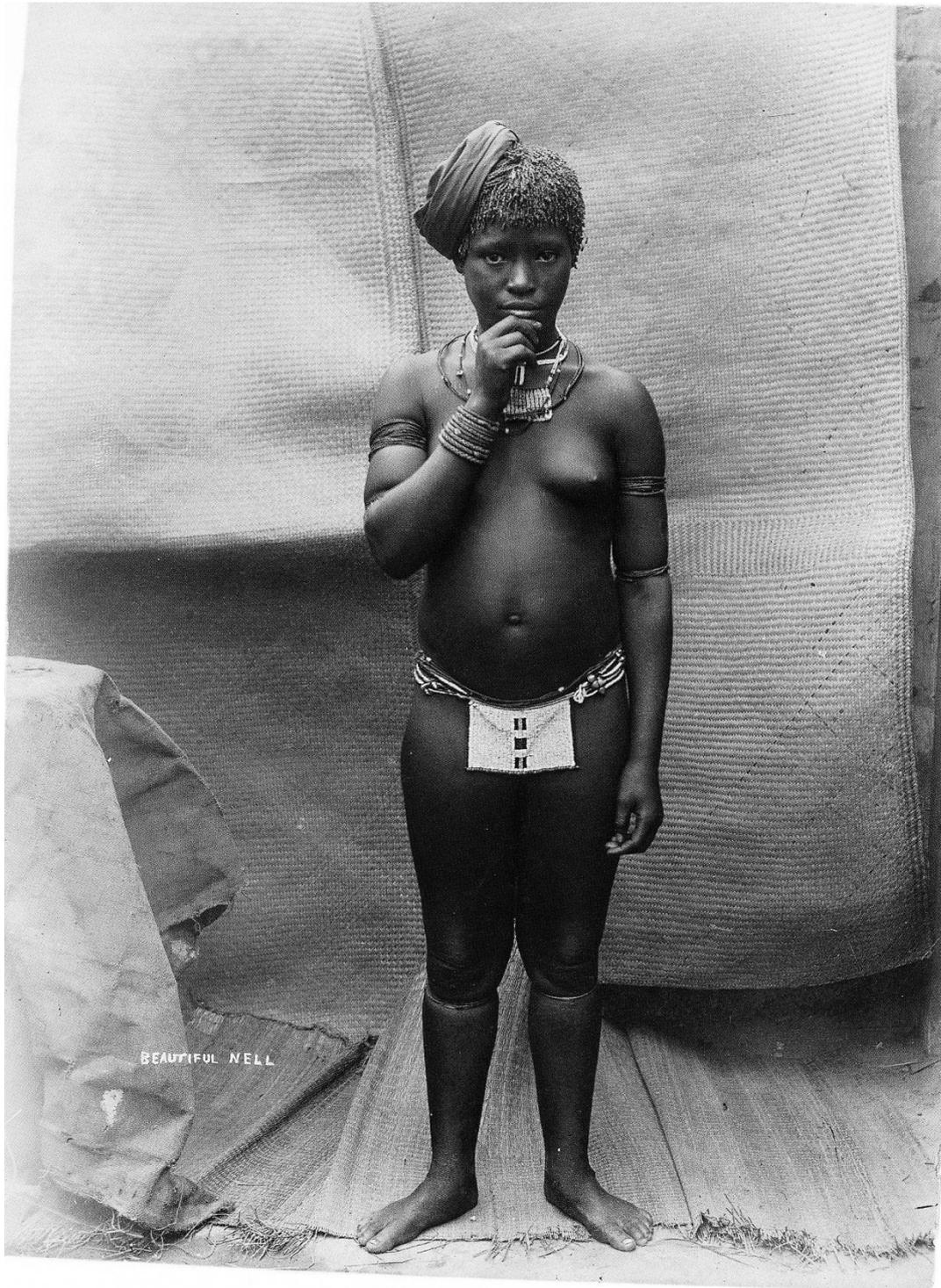


Figure 5. Barnett, J

Woman standing in a studio.nd.

Gelatine Developing - out print.

Courtesy of the artist and Stevenson Gallery.

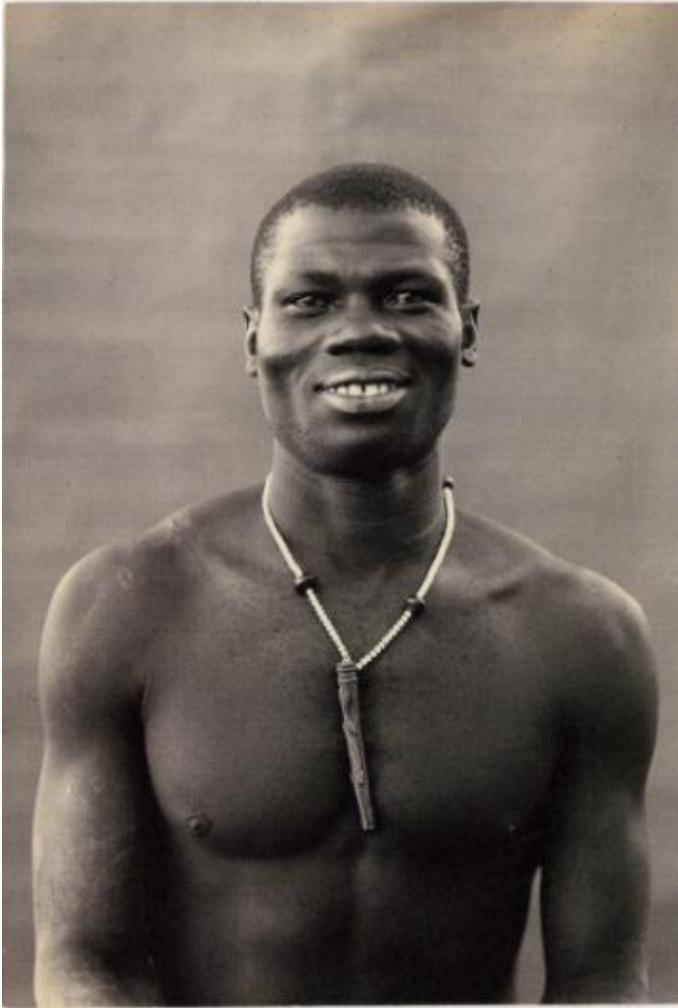


Figure 6. Alfred Martin Duggan Cronin

Morolong Youth. nd.

Gelatine Developing - out print.

Courtesy of the artist and Stevenson Gallery.

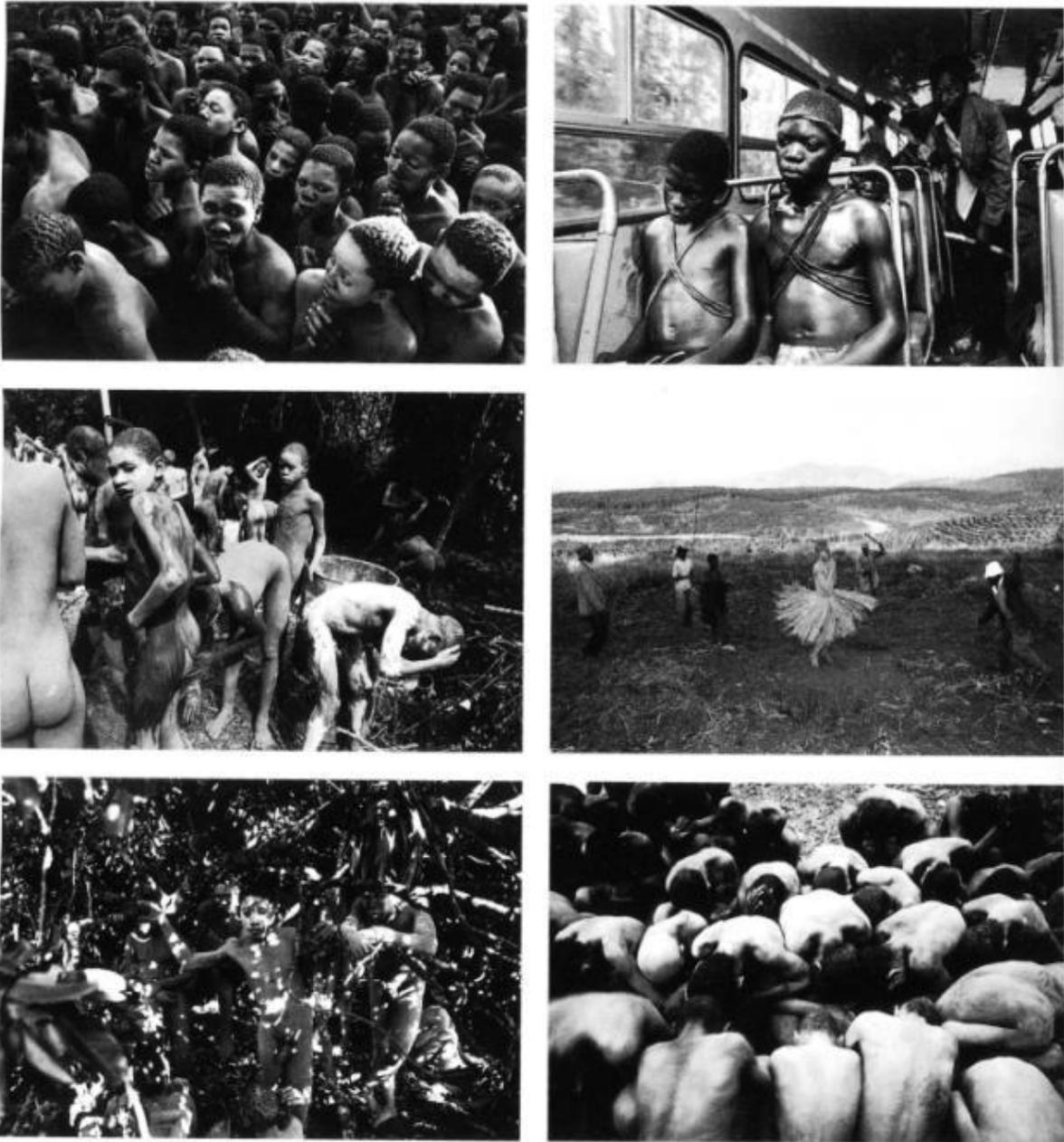


Figure 7. Steve Hilton – Barber
Traditional Northern Sotho men. (1991).

Photographic print.

Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 8a. Pieter Hugo (2005).

John Addai Wild Honey collector, Techiman District, Ghana.

Archival pigment ink on cotton rag paper.

Courtesy of the artist and Stevenson Gallery.



Figure 8b. Pieter Hugo (2005).

Paul Ankomah Wild Honey Collector, Techiman District Ghana.

Archival pigment ink on cotton rag paper.

Courtesy of the artist and Stevenson Gallery.



Figure 9. Pieter Hugo (2005).

Mallam Galadima Ahmadu with Jamis, Abuja, Nigeria.

Archival pigment ink on cotton rag paper.

Courtesy of the artist and Stevenson Gallery.



Figure10. Robert Mapplethorpe

Man in a polyester suit (1980).

Photographic print.

Courtesy of the Mapplethorpe Foundation.

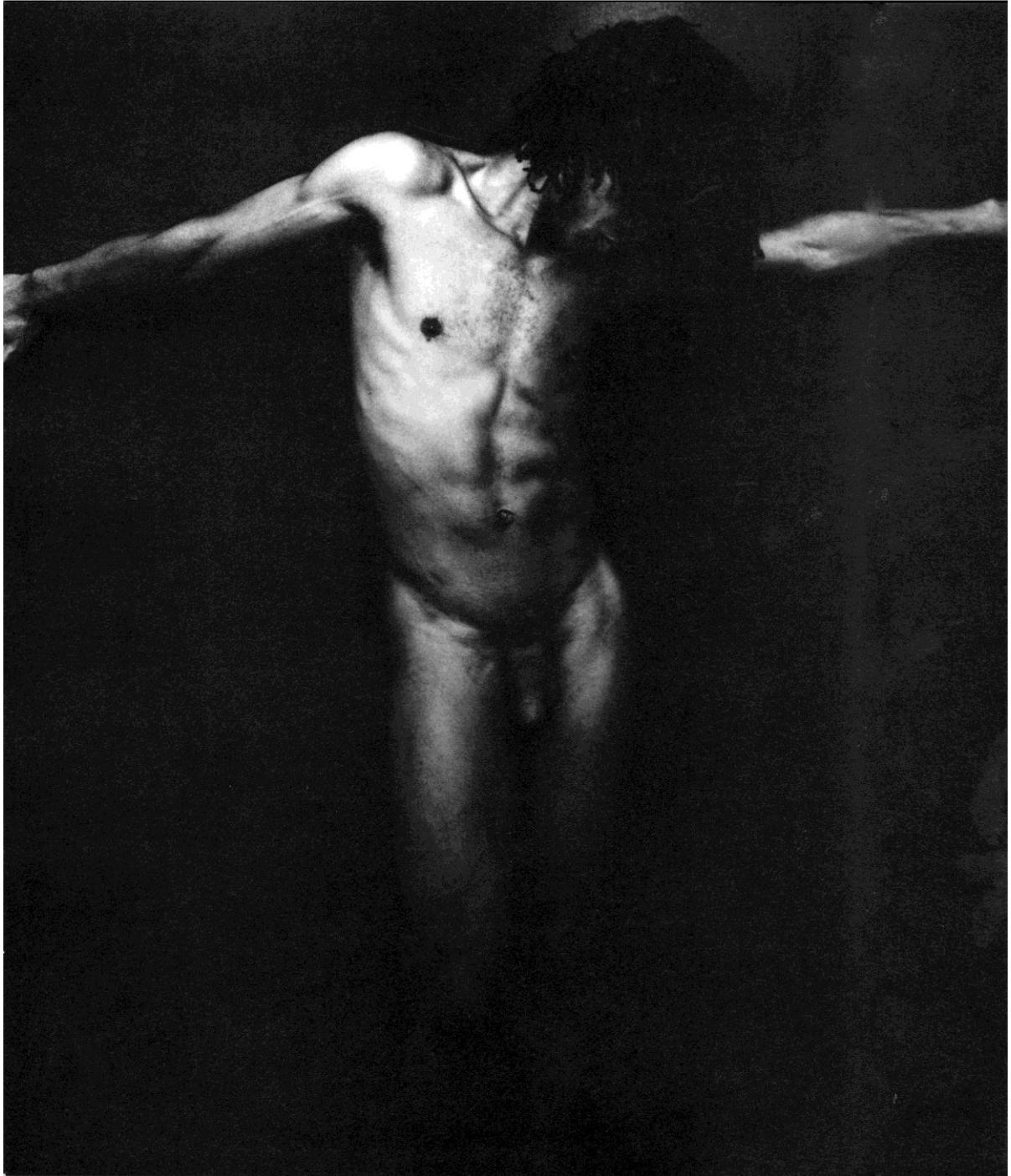


Figure 11. Rotimi Fani-Kayode.

Crucifixion. (1989).

Photographic print.

Courtesy of the artist Estate and Autograph.



Figure 12. Lunga Kama

Ze 2010.

Digital photographic print.

Courtesy of the artist and Stevenson Gallery.



Figure 13. Lyle Ashton Harris

Ude and Lyle (2006).

Photographic print.

Courtesy of wordpress.com and artist.

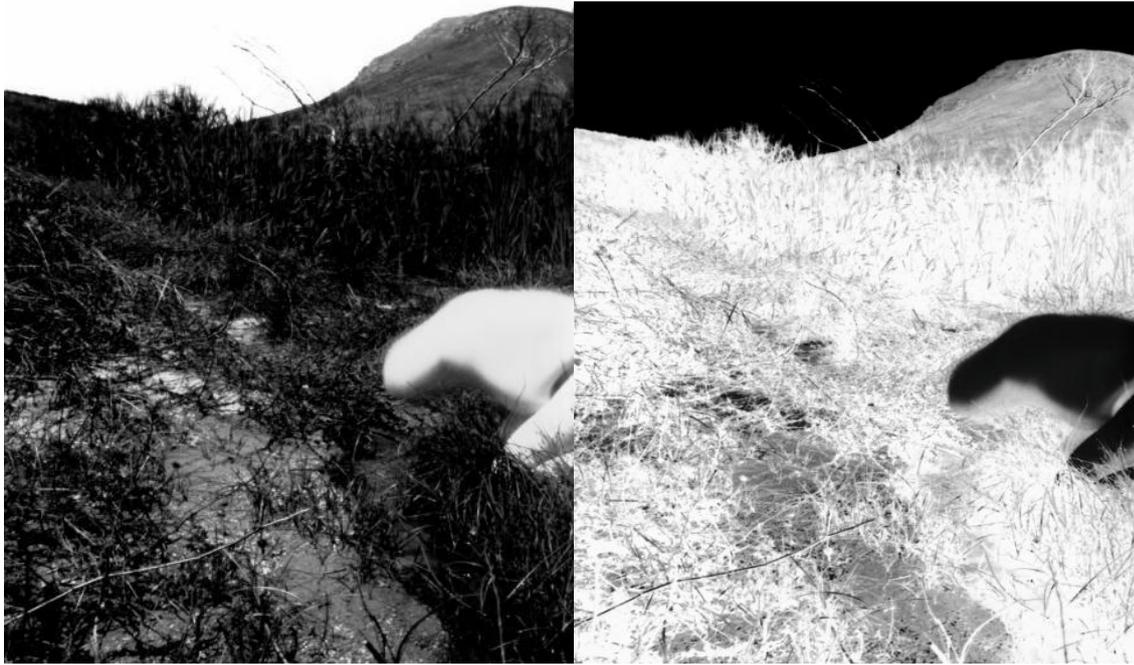


Figure 14. Lunga Kama

Untitled (2010).

Silver Gelatine print.

Courtesy of the artist and Stevenson Gallery.



Figure 15. Lunga Kama

Untitled (2010).

Silver Gelatine print

Courtesy of the artist and Stevenson Gallery.

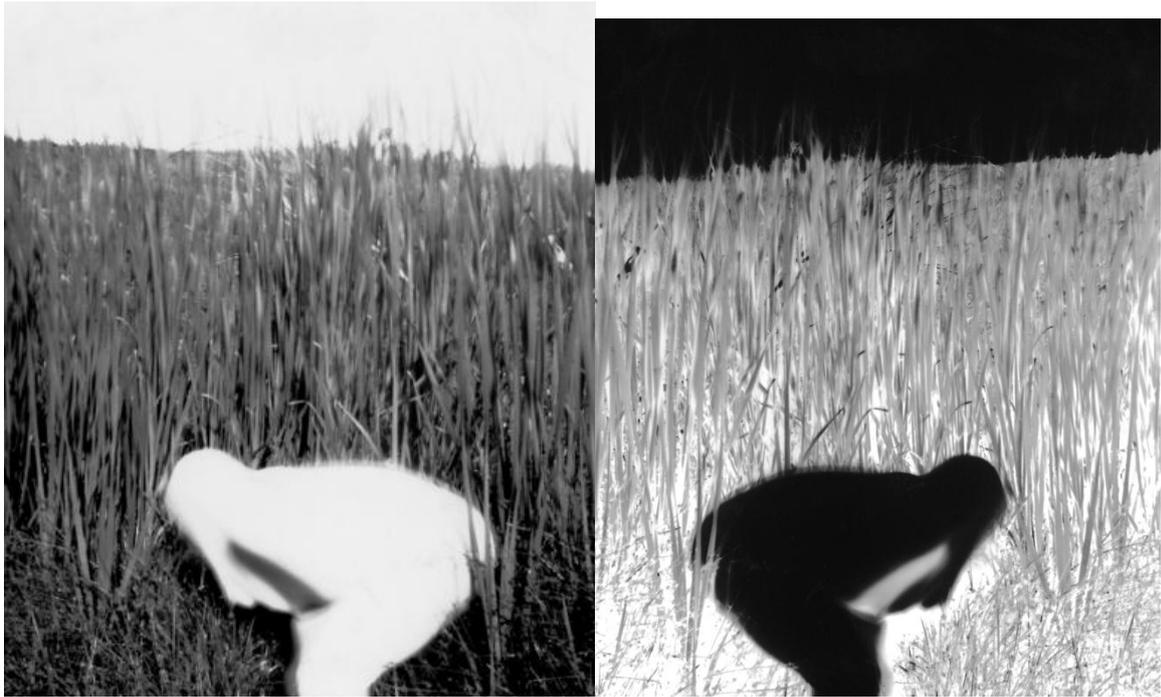


Figure 16. Lunga Kama

Untitled (2010).

Silver Gelatine print.

Courtesy of the artist and Stevenson Gallery.

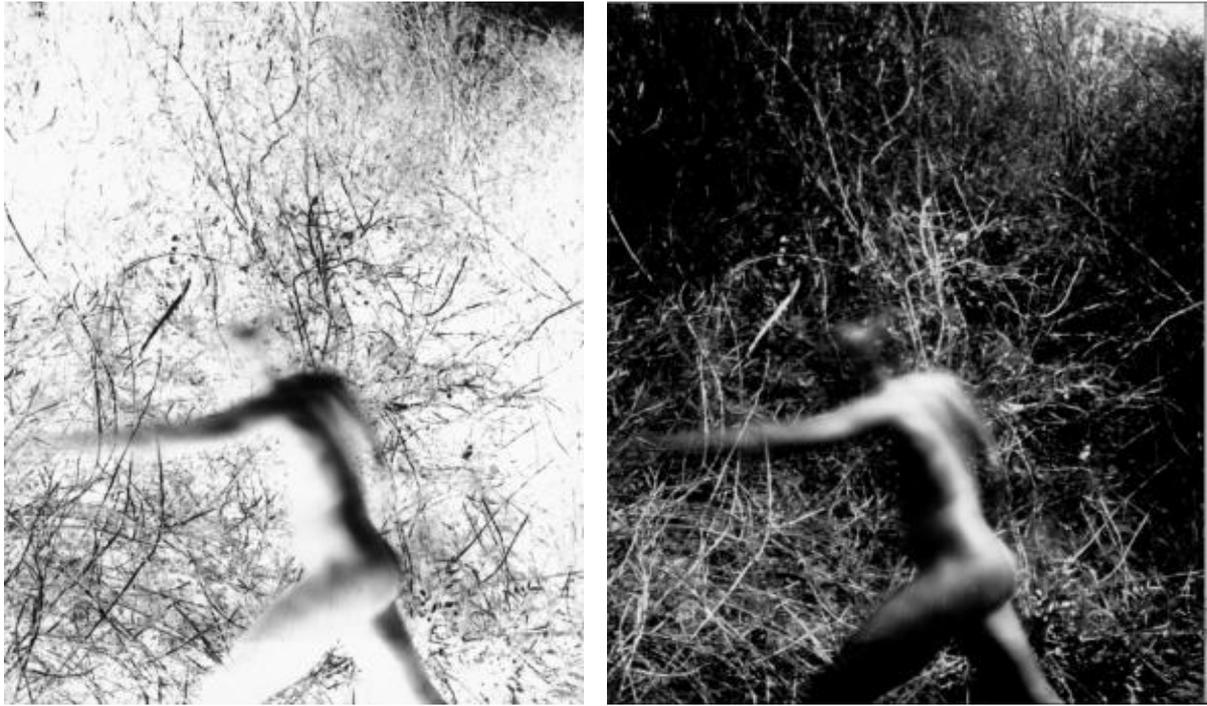


Figure 17. Lunga Kama

Untitled (2010).

Silver Gelatine print.

Courtesy of the artist and Stevenson Gallery.



Figure 18. Lunga Kama

Untitled (2010).

Silver Gelatin print.

Courtesy of the artist and Stevenson Gallery.



Figure 19a. Lunga Kama

Untitled (2010).

Silver Gelatine print.

Courtesy of the artist and Stevenson Gallery.



Figure 19b. Lunga Kama

Untitled (2010).

Silver Gelatine print.

Courtesy of the artist and Stevenson Gallery.

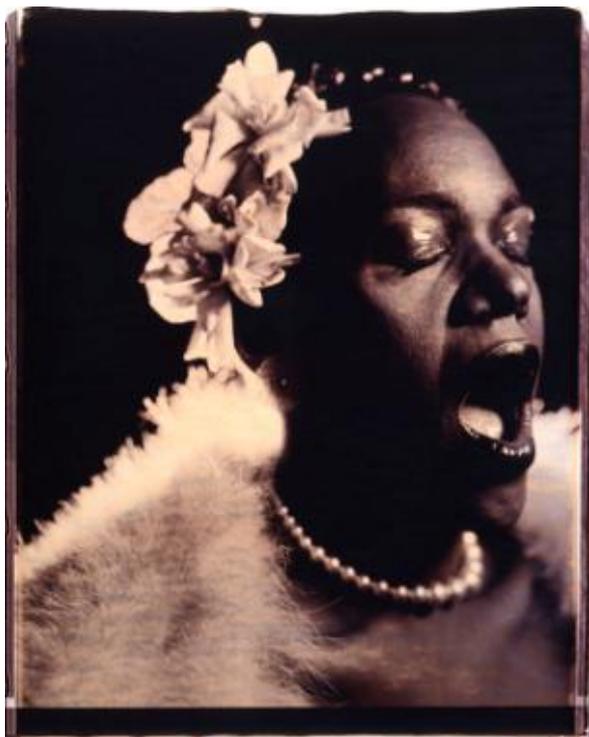


Figure 20. Lyle Ashton Harris.

Billie Holiday # 14. (2002).

Monochromatic dye – diffusion transfer print (Polaroid).

Courtesy of the artist and C. R. G. Gallery New York.



Figure 21. Zanele Muholi

Miss Lesbian I (2009).

Digital photographic print.

Courtesy of the artist and Stevenson Gallery.



Figure 22. Lunga Kama.

Lunga Kama I. (2009).

Photographic print.

Courtesy of the artist and Stevenson Gallery.



Figure 23. Lunga Kama.

Lunga Kama II (2009).

Photographic Print.

Courtesy of the artist and Stevenson Gallery.



Figure 24. Huxley Henry Thomas

Australian woman (1849).

Courtesy of the artist and Wikipedia



Figure 25. Lunga Kama

Ze (2010).

Digital print.

Courtesy of the artist and Stevenson Gallery.



Figure 26a. Lunga Kama.

Ubuntu libhongo lam (2009).

Photographic print.

Courtesy of the artist and Stevenson Gallery.



Figure 26b. Lunga Kama.

Ubuntu libhongo lam (2009).

Photographic print.

Courtesy of the artist and Stevenson Gallery.

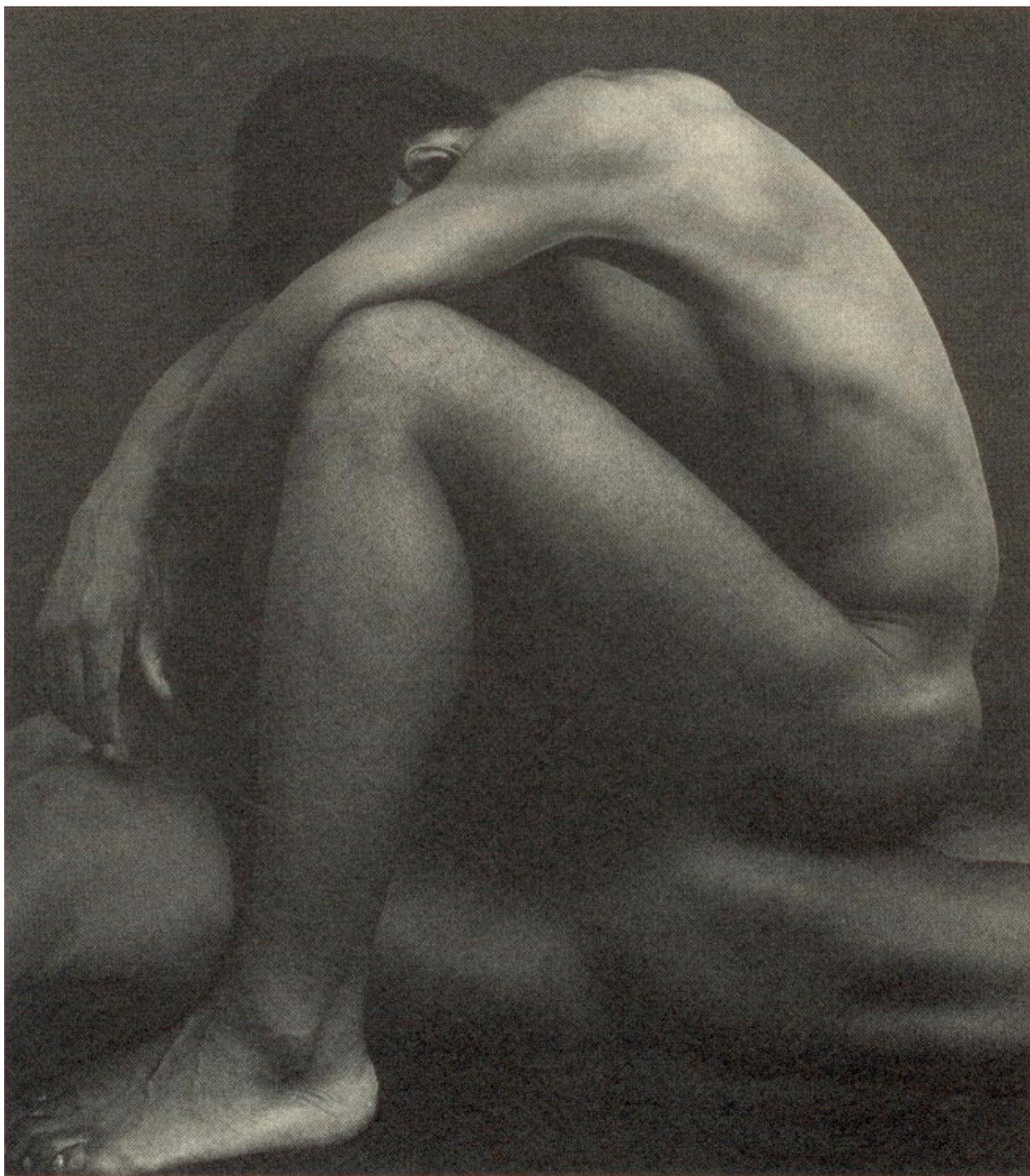


Figure 27. Rotimi Fani-Kayode

Technique of ecstasy (1989).

Photographic print.

Courtesy of the artist Estate and Autograph.

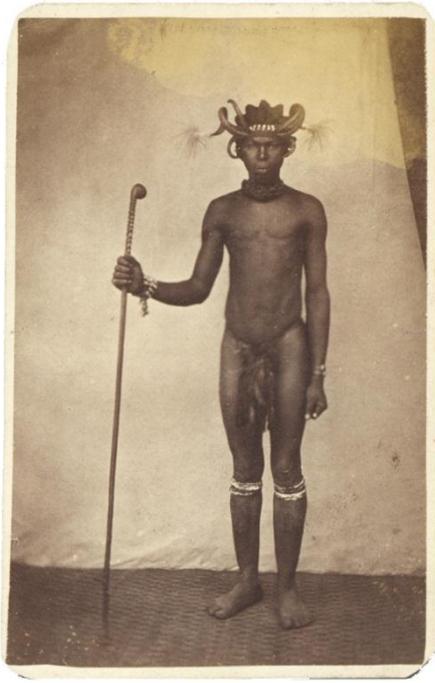


Figure 28. Fritsch, T.G.

Zulu from Natal. n.d.

Courtesy of artist and Professor Dietrich, K.

<http://hdl.handle.net/110019.1/3691>

