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# Reframing the Black Subject Ideology and Fantasy in Contemporary South African Representation

## Okwui Enwezor

Ι

In the house adjacent to the one in which I live in a suburb of Johannesburg, my Afrikaner neighbour makes it a duty, every weekend and on public holidays, to unfurl on his flag pole, the blue, white and orange colours of the old South African nation. Like all symbols of nationalistic identification, this particular flag raises very paradoxical emotions in people, each of which - mortification or nostalgia invariably arrive with grave consequences on the direction which South Africa, seem irrevocably plunged. While it has become quite rare today to find a South African of any race who was not either a staunch supporter of the African National Congress or an anti-apartheid activist, my new neighbours have in very stark terms welcomed me into the side of a South African political and social debate that is not easily addressed in public. They have done so by making it very clear on which side of the ideological plane their allegiances lie. From the look of things, it seems nothing has changed for these people and thousands of others like them who still persistently dream of the return of the old nation. So nostalgia, cleansed of very poisonous memories endures, and is thus justified in the almost fatalistic clinging to a relic of racism. In many ways this defiant usage

of an old nationalist symbol, with its undisguised history and terrifying consequences, is nothing new. It has companions in the recent fascist revivalism that has engulfed Europe in the aftermath of the cold war with the return of swastikas and Nazi symbolism, and the more enduring history of the Confederacy flag in the southern United States.

Reading this image in the uneasy light which governs South Africa's return to the ranks of modern nations, the flag display reveals, and at the same time masks, certain anxieties around the transition from apartheid to a representative, tolerant, liberal democracy. As I write this, I am listening to the wind snap the stiff cloth and colours of the fading flag. I am fascinated by that sound, by the rituality of the owner's forlorn hope. However, my South African companion is less enamoured of my fascination with that ideological prop of longing, the lost dream of a fallen nation whose haunted past is very much part of the present, a sentinel that echoes the ambivalence and the desires of both the new South African nation, and the fantasy of a time fast fading with the bleached tricolour of the old flag. However hopeful one may sound in articulating the

novelty and newness of South Africa, we must constantly remind ourselves that, while nations may disappear, the ideologies which feed and sustain them, and which form the foundational basis of their creation, are more difficult to eradicate. For they are imaginatively reconstituted by using the surplus resources of their enduring myths as banners to rally adherents.

Thus in late 1996, two years after the legal fall of apartheid, it is hardly revealing to observe that racism and racial suspicion remain rampant realities of the new South African state. We can hear it in the resplendent, undisguised accent of those anxious voices who still await the owl of Minerva to return with the news that the experiment was a failure: the 'natives' are simply ill-prepared to run a functioning, well-oiled state. In pointing out the above, I am less interested in the fraught political context out of which these issue than I am in using the questions which they raise to examine issues of representation in a culture which has lived for generations with racist stereotypes as one of the most prevailing attitudes amongst members of its social polity. To sketch out the image fully, I want to begin with two analogous depictions that run synchronously: Baas and Massa, Kaffir and Nigger, The Hottentot and the auction block, Jim Crow and apartheid. These analogies sketch out an ideological pattern that runs through the histories of both the United States of America and South Africa.

Their uncanny resemblance, however, is not an accident. For they are both founded on blackness as anathema to the discourse of whiteness; whiteness as a resource out of which the trope of the nation, nationality and citizenship is constructed, and everything else that is prior is negated, defaced, marginalised, colonised. By thinking analogously of the two systems of whiteness as official policy, and as a mechanism of bureaucratic normality, I want to extrapolate from the cultural text of the United States to make a commentary on the fascinating usage, in post-apartheid representation, of the African body as subject and prop in both the political and cultural expressions of the 'New South Africa'.

This retrieval of the black figure from the debased image bank of the former apartheid state is not surprising at all. Nor is it necessarily new; it is parcelled in the speech act of a 'nation' emerging from one of the most

traumatic experiences of the twentieth century: the long, terrible, insomniac night of apartheid. Dialectically, what one encounters within this scripted and representational presence is a nation seeking a new identity, and thus new images, new geographies, boundaries with which to ballast its strategic and mythological coherence and unity as what has come to be known, popularly, as the Rainbow Nation. To put it bluntly, such a search is clearly related to how differently whiteness and its privileges is presently conceived, interpreted, translated and used to access the code of a disturbed sense of South African nationality. Thus to examine the charged descriptive detail and what strikes multilingual, and hopefully, multivocal - is to keen one's ears to the new uses and revindication of whiteness (in very subdued and barely registered forms) as an idiom of cultural identity, that is, as a renewed and authoritative presence in the country's iconographical text.

II

Although today the word 'identity' has lost the lustre of its discursive currency, especially as multicultural and postcolonial discourse come under persistent academic attack, it would seem that South Africa has arrived belatedly to such contestations. Yet, it might be worth adding that in reality everything about South Africa in the last fifty years has often been defined along this axis. Thus its belatedness, could justifiably be seen from the position of its rearguard position vis-à-vis how identity up until recently had been bounded to the archaic formulation of whiteness as a nationalistic desire.

To be WHITE in many senses is an ideological fantasy. In discursive terms, it is a fantasy framed in the old mode of nationalist address (pursued with brutal efficiency by old apartheid ideologues), the arena in which all kinds of ideological longings converge, and are recovered in terms of a specific socio-political agenda and historical formation. Such an agenda and formation have often been replayed in the charged territory of racial pathologies, the kind which Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* described as "the magic to turn chance into destiny". This in turn is invested with symbolic signs and positive values of origin, space, and a sense of who

occupies that space, who owns it, who lords over it, and for whose benefit it is worked. In the specific example of South Africa, as in the American model, the identity of whiteness binds itself to the exclusionary politics of national discourse. Who is included or excluded from that body politic and on what terms is their admittance or exclusion ratified?

Until recently in South Africa, as typified by Germany's jus sanguinis ethnic policy, citizenship (nationality) was a special animus that carried the Calvinist symbol of whiteness. For it not only declaimed belonging from the position of exclusion, it effectively rendered millions of the indigenous population persona non grata. Under such definition, to challenge the sanctity of whiteness, to represent it adversely, either in writing or image-making, to question the Calvinist ethic of racial purity on which it is founded, is to court terrible reprisals (brutal beatings, ban orders, jail, solitary confinement, exile, death) or to be cast out of the inner sanctum of the broederbond. And nowhere is the ideology of this racial fundamentalism more potently manifested, especially around the shaping of national identity, than in the arena of sports and visual arts: modes of culture which, according to Edward Said's definition in Culture and Imperialism, occupy the realm of pleasure and leisure, albeit coarsened by brutal exclusion and primitive racial determinism.

For years, because they were neither citizens nor persons with any national affiliation, black South Africans were never offered the opportunity to participate in the corporate body of national sports, let alone to represent such a body or speak on its behalf. Sports had simply become a purified zone, the hallowed ground upon which white supremacist impulses traded its currency. In art, the museums of South Africa, in their attempt to redress the imbalances of the past, are paying the price for their telling neglect and exclusion from their collections of work by African artists. Because of this neglect, an intensified activity of gobbling up any work of art made by 'black' artists has picked up both within public and private institutions in the last ten years. But since the pragmatic value of everything that defines the sense of the old South Africa derived from the interregnum of white nationalism and black resistance, both in images, popular iconography, literature, language and religion, it goes without saying that, to speak authentically about the nation, to

render the exactitude of its character, to probe its borders and alleviate its insecurity, to draw it into light through all kinds of signifying devices, the birthright of such utterance (which included speaking on behalf of the 'native') ultimately belonged to the white interlocutor.

### III

But what is it exactly, that makes whiteness such an exorbitant space of subjectivity, as the argot of unimpeachable and irrefutable testimony of the knowledge of the colonised native? With whiteness, one can hazard saying - though this might imply an essentialist projection or even a prejudicial marking ---- that its tropes can be related to what Claire Kahane, following psychoanalytic theory, has written of as "object relations theory". She writes that, "Object relations theory assumes that from birth, the infant engages in formative relations with — objects — entities perceived as separate from the self, either whole persons or parts of the body, either existing in the external world or internalised as mental representations".1

Is this then how the Other is invented and assigned his place on the margins of the nation, in the wilderness of incommensurability? Here the Hottentot Venus, whose supposedly horrendous looking vagina is now preserved in formaldehyde in a museum in France, and the black man on the auction block, as objects of denigration, become props of this ideological fantasy, the degenerative sketch from which whiteness stages its purity. These two historical scenes in which the black body has been tendered as display, reproduce the abject as a sign of black identification. Thus, the Hottentot Venus and the black man on the auction block signal a kind of black genitalia abjection, products of a white masochist enjoyment, of black sexuality in its most debased form.

Although today these are thought of as things of the past, in reality they remain perversely lodged in popular culture texts, in films, novels and art. In films the fantasy is of the menacing black criminal and prostitute. In contemporary art, we have Robert Mapplethorpe to thank for furthering the illusion of the black body as an object of enjoyment and spectacle, in short for helping restore it to an aesthetic state of grace. On this account, Olu Oguibe has noted succinctly, that "the introduction of digitalization in our time

has sanitized erasure and transformed it into a messless act, and the object of the obliterative act now disappears together with the evidence of its own excision, making erasure an act without trace".<sup>2</sup> No doubt some of these acts are also constantly played out in the resurgent emergence of the black subject as a popular image in all forms of representation in contemporary South Africa.

In the post-apartheid moment of national reconciliation, reconstruction and unification, we have heard so much of the militant black subject who wants to change everything and remake the nation in the illusory image of black identity. Conversely, another enduring popular image has emerged of the sulking white subject who harbours fantasies of an ethnic white volkstaat, and failing that, either emigrates to Australia or stays behind, and bitterly complains about how things have changed. Both images are not fallacies. They represent the polar axes around which the terms of transition are being negotiated. But they are both founded on how notions of whiteness have often constituted the terms of national identity and citizenship and must now either be amended or attenuated and deconstructed in order to reconstitute the new image of the nation as something neither white nor black, but 'a rainbow of multiple reflections'. Hence, to speak through the territory of both the old and new South African nation and the intersection of black and white subjectivity within their iconographic lexicon, might it be possible to begin with the question of the abject, so as to delineate what binds the subject of the nation to both its object of desire and disavowal, its internal unity, its frame of stability and to that which disturbs it, calls it into question, sets it adrift?

As part of the experience of apartheid, it could be related that the primal symptom of whiteness was always in relation to that broad category, in which large groups of people were reproduced in the image of the abject, that which Julia Kristeva defined as what "disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules".<sup>3</sup> Frantz Fanon relates this to that moment when a young white child shrinks in horror and terror into her mother's arms, and points to a black man in a public space as some kind of defilement, a mark of excess, an abcess sprung fresh in the temporal imagination. "Look, a Negro", screamed the child. Here the Negro becomes an object of fetishistic fascination and disturbance to both the spatial and temporal order. There is both a demand for the repression of his presence and his objectification, so as to mark out the divide that separates his polluting presence from the stable environment of whiteness: the enclosed suburbia in which he is forever a stranger, a visitor. Within South Africa, the Pass Laws, Separate Amenities Act, Bantu Education Act, Group Areas Act, etc, were the mechanisms employed to cleanse territories coveted by whites of the scourge of blackness. Part of this schematic trace of the abject as a transgressor of borders and rules is especially disturbing, because the abject seem so wholly reproduced in the image of the criminal, the fugitive, the trespasser. This point was so necessary in the construction of South African identity. regimented as it was in a colour-coded system of appreciation, value and worth, of which the ideological fantasy of whiteness becomes what everything is measured against, whether as resistance or aspiration.

Thus the racism which instituted. incorporated and structured apartheid can be said to have been accommodated first by what Edward Said noted in his elaborate study of Orientalism as an ontological and epistemodistinction between the settler logical population and the indigenous populations. These distinctions, which lie at the root of the colonial project, worked on the premise of two inventions: one, on the ontological description of the native as devoid of history, and two, on the epistemological description of the native subject as devoid of knowledge and subjectivity. On each account, the colonial territory grows more expansive as the imaginary map drawn from the two distinctions opens further a corporate body of interests in which the native now exists in direct competition for its resources --- material, history, representation --which culminates in resistance and sets in motion the process of decolonisation.

But for this sense of competition to grow into an ideological struggle, it must first be imagined as imperilling either the profitable position of the settler or putting at even greater risk the interests and benefits that accrue from his superiority, that is to say, his race, language, culture, history, knowledge, etc, the authority with which he narrates history; in short, whiteness. This is the crucial point where African subjectivity and white interests seem to intersect in the contest of the meaning of identity in post-apartheid South Africa. It appears that the struggle for this meaning hinges on who controls the representational intentionality of the body politic, especially its archive of images: symbolic and literal.

IV

The colonized man is an envious man. And this the settler knows very well; when their glances meet he ascertains bitterly, always on the defensive, 'They want to take our place'. It is true, for there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settlers' place.<sup>4</sup>

Fanon's astute observation of the Manichean universe inhabited by the opposing factions of black and white, and the competing narratives of the native and settler, bears some unadorned truths and demands some attention, if at least cursorily. Surely, the black South African is envious of the position of the white South African, who has always deigned, and seen it as natural, to speak on his behalf, for his presence, history, socio-political position and place within South Africa. Surely the colonised man is an envious man. For he wants to write his own history, to retrieve his own body from the distortive proclivities of white representation. Even though on this account, he is no less willing to succumb to certain ideals of ethnicity, to ideological fantasies of blackness to tell his story.

It doesn't matter under which guise it is told (whether it is in the recuperation of the mythological essence of the omnipotent King Shaka as a noble warrior fighting colonial incursions on territories that belong *rightfully* to Africans) as long as it connects with some atavistic sense of destiny. In other words he wants to take the place of the settler. And he is no more willing to give up that dream than the settler is willing to concede that key ideological position. For in their historical relationship, the settler always feigns to know his native better than the native knows himself. It is this crucial position that the white South African, who has always been in control of how the eyes see and perceive the African, is not yet ready to give up. Hence, in recent South African representation, the ideological battle seems to be over the control of the black body, its frame of analysis, the projection site in which its image is refreshed with the new insight of a suddenly untroubled social relation. But according to Fanon the two zones are opposed.

V

If, as Stuart Hall suggested, "identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves in, the narratives of the past", what happens when suddenly the narratives of white representation of Africans are challenged by a black counternarrative that seeks to exclude how African subjectivity have been positioned by and within white South African narratives? It is no secret that in the aftermath of emancipation, that it is precisely the terrain of the "narratives of the past" that is today the most fiercely contested. As we all know, for the greater part of European presence in South Africa, the spectres, the haunted and historic memory, the glow, the consciousness, the metaphorical speech of European identity has stood solidly, for half a millennium, on a nationalism of white supremacist ideology; the workaday speech which in the faded glory of the fallen apartheid republic signals a desire still unfulfilled, a speech act currently being unlearned in the space of representation, and within the transitional haze of political and social transformation. If no articulate voices have been heard in this din, it ought not be surprising, particularly if one listens within earshot of the contrapuntal narrative of the 'native's' often marginal and scatological agitation to be heard, and the hardened habit of the settler not to listen at all. At present an impasse exists.

Two years after the official demise of apartheid, Nelson Mandela and the majority of South Africans — black and white — have tried nothing less than a reinvention of their once divided country, a new South African identity attempting to shed the wool of its racist past. The drive for this new entity is the emergence of a new nation, from one that lived in isolation and mutual suspicion, in competition and as adversaries, to one today described as the last miracle of the century. Part of the formidable repertoire of images with which the nation has attempted to heal itself is framed in the iconographical technicolour of the 'Rainbow Nation', a term coined by Desmond Tutu to describe the multicultural population of South Africa. One's understanding of the 'Rainbow Nation' has less to do with its mythic dimensions, the uneasy air of ambivalence which visits its every invocation, than with the pragmatic politics of reconstruction which it seeks to articulate, a reborn but new nationalism. But no one in full honesty believes the 'Rainbow Nation' to be a long term project. Rather, it is a project of accommodation, of armistice, in the absence of which competition between the various members could again erupt into civil strife. Along this thinking, Rob Nixon has noted that "much the strongest current of nationalism in South Africa --- that represented by the ANC - is inclusive, nonracial, and premised on a conciliatory unity, not an enforced ethnic homogeneity".5 But the critics of the 'Rainbow Nation', easily ignore this fact.<sup>6</sup> In this regard, one casts an uneasy glance at the direction of KwaZulu Natal, where the cauldron of Zulu nationalism hubbles

On this note, I want to suggest that nationalism, whether framed in the sectional rhetoric of Zulu nationalism, in the volkstaat of Afrikaner nationalism, in the settler colony of generic whiteness as an essential way of being, or blackness as a revolutionary discourse of decolonisation, has always been an inextricable reality that frames South African identity. There is no better way to acknowledge this sense of factionalism than in the different responses to the 'Rainbow Nation' concept, particularly from a white community which suddenly finds itself a minority, and potentially the underlings of their former African vassals. And nowhere has this recent resistance been more fierce than in a representational terrain still dominated by highly literate, but nonetheless unreflexive white cultural practitioners unblinkingly intent on representing black subjectivity at the margins of cultural and aesthetic discourse. Unmoored from what they have always known, that is, the privilege of unquestioned whiteness from which everything is refracted, the Rainbow now seems a motley reflection of images alien to the old sensibility. Very simply, the Rainbow either opposes or seems antagonistic to whiteness. The Rainbow as what "disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" has made artistic practice a volatile and transgressive act of realpolitik, for it has suddenly made South Africans clearly aware of how different, culturally, ethnically and linguistically they are as a 'nation'. No longer is that hardened

position of binaries, black/white, settler/ native, coloniser/colonised, etc, tenable.

VI

This calls into question what images in a decolonising South Africa should look like, and who has the right to use which images, and what the authorising narrative ought to be. If decolonisation is, as Fanon noted, "the meeting of two forces, opposed to each other by their very nature", or if one might add, linked by mutual suspicion, is it possible to suggest that the recent conference, amongst Afrikaner intellectuals in Stellenbosch, Western Cape, in a bid to form an organisation that will promote Afrikaans language and culture, could be linked to an opposition to the 'Rainbow Nation'? Some of the derisive, perhaps even naive mockery of the 'Rainbow Nation', on the very level of their ideological promotion of a wounded whiteness, could be related as separatism under disguise. At least it seems to suggest that. Judging from the recent convulsive events around the world, this kind of nationalism has persistently made its bid by invoking a certain particularity, by investing its images with a sense of uniqueness, a manifest destiny without which the desire and destiny of the national entity withers. To be potent, the object of nationalist discourse has to see itself as endangered, on the brink of extinction, in need of special protection and reparation.

This is what was so disturbing to some of my black South African colleagues about the Stellenbosch conference. Not least because some of its most prominent advocates, such as the writer Breyten Breytenbach, have strong liberal credentials in the leftist politics of South Africa, and were staunch anti-apartheid activists. Even so, the Stellenbosch conference was not a display of unanimity on the meaning of what ostensibly may be perceived, as Afrikaner chauvinism rearing its ugly head again. Some of the attendees of the conference, such as the poet Antjie Krog, who has written brilliantly and movingly in the Weekly Mail & Guardian about the harrowing testimonies to the Truth and Reconciliation Committee chronicling past human rights abuses during the political struggle against apartheid, were uneasy about the implications of such a gathering, and made an attempt to distance themselves from any suggestion of reviving Afrikaner nationalism.

To encounter this debate as it unfolds in the disjunctive, uneasy peace of the 'New South Africa' is to admit the unfinished business of the transformation of the apartheid state and the huge task of decolonisation. It is also to acknowledge and enumerate the fragility of the post-apartheid nation. For here, the question that could be asked of the Stellenbosch colloquium is: What exactly is it about the 'Rainbow Nation', barely two years into reunification, that makes Afrikaners so uneasy about their prospects as an ethnic minority in South Africa? Is this response — the inability of a once dominant white culture to deal with its diminished role and sense of superior entitlement in the cultural and political life of the nation — a preamble to a resurgent Afrikaner nationalism that is caught so well in the shadow of the Voortrekker monument in Pretoria? Can one assume that such a colloquium, however well meaning, is not a pretext for the rallying of the troops below from above?"

I want to return to how today this fantasy again images the black subject in the old and warped frame of the apartheid era as lack, representing him at the liminal point of his defeat. That is, his story, as spoken through the transitional identity of post-apartheid contemporary representations, is narrated in the past tense, as if the narrators want to stop history; as if everything about the black subject resides only in his pre-linguistic period, in the residue of his diminished state as subject, prior to his act of speech, fixed in his eternal silence. Of course these narratives are cleverly couched in a manner that appear to recover the essence of a black subjectivity suppressed during apartheid.

So while the Stellenbosch conferees enumerate within listening distance of the nation, the mythological space of the 'Rainbow Nation', the site from which Mandela's daydream takes its *fait accompli*, attempts to steer a different course, a course in which all ethnicities are recognised as 'equal', perforce of the recently ratified constitution. Could one even suggest that in participating in what is seen as chest thumping and the projection of the robust and exemplary characteristics of Afrikaner speech and subjectivity during a difficult period of reconciliation, that the conference seemed not only ill-advised, but arrogant? And in the face of testimonies of horrible apartheid crimes made to the Truth and Reconciliation Committee that was set up to investigate the murderous policy of the old regime, does this portend a larger lack of sensitivity and accountability to victims of Afrikaner domination? In mounting a drive to promote Afrikaans in such a short space of time, in a volatile period of reconciliation, could these intellectuals be accused of lapsing into a form of amnesia and disavowal of historical memory, characteristic of the holocaust deniers in post-Nazi Germany? And finally could this drive for the promotion of Afrikaans as special and endangered be seen as a need to shore up and maintain the dominance of a disproportionately minority Afrikaner culture in post-apartheid South Africa, that some of these progressive white intellectuals are still staying with that old image of the 'native' entrapped in muteness?

#### VII

Perhaps there is a difference between what the colloquium staged, and what the artist attempts in employing the image of the African subject to come to terms with what South Africa was, what it is today, and what it could become. But why am I unconvinced by the remonstrative gestures of those artists who sentimentalise African images, who persist with those images that are devoid of conflict, of the quietly suffering but still noble African? Since he can't speak for himself, he is spoken for. I want to believe in the sincerity of these gestures, to think that the whiteness of the artists is beside the point.

And I want to believe even less in any kind of analogy to that mindset, which on the other hand, still persists with that old business of serving up African culture as spectacle and source of reassuring, harmless entertainment. But my faith seems so forbiddingly racked by doubt. We easily deceive ourselves, believing that the dividing line of racial discourse is not as baited as it once was. Today, the spectacles of yesterday have returned. They form the most resourceful and formidable examples of representation which have recently made their appearance in the booming South African tourist industry. In what are described as cultural villages throughout South Africa, socalled old African customs are being staged for mostly white audiences, in exclusive holiday resorts. In Lesedi Cultural Village in Guateng Province, tourists have their choice of which African fantasy they may sample. Depending on your taste, you can sample Zulu dancing, in which pot-bellied ferocious looking men in leopard skins prance and stamp around a bright burning fire, a sight which could only be described as a performative ethnographic surrealism. Or you can partake in an authentic Xhosa, Pedi or Sotho domestic scene, replete with the visible iconographical marks of those cultures. It seems in this retrieval of African customs from a besmirched ethnographic cupboard, only those aspects of African culture which entertain are presented. Such are the images of Africans which are beginning to enter the archival bank of the new South African nation.

Of all such cultural villages, Kagga Gamma, a space that does double duty as a game park in the Western Cape, is perhaps the most primitive. At Kagga Gamma, the so-called endangered Bushman has been reinvested as the entertainment and put on display. His brief? To put in a performance daily, which could live up to or approximate, as it replays the essence of his authenticity, certain colonial fantasies and representations of his nomadic hunter and gatherer past. For something a little more than subsistent wage, he is given a leather loin cloth, bows and arrows and in full view of the paying guests at Kagga Gamma, performs the task which most defines that aspect of his 'authentic' past.

#### VIII

Perhaps a headline in a New York Times article in early 1996, which reported on Kagga Gamma, captured the tragedy of this form of representation. The headline read: 'Endangered Bushman Finds Refuge in a Game Park'. Even after the fall of apartheid, the temptation to retrieve the 'native' in his full ethnic regalia remains in representations which attempt to address the notion of difference and otherness as forms of critique of those images. While such a critique may be the primary intention of the works, the irony is that most of them uncritically end up seduced by their fascination for the abject figure and docile bodies of African men, women and children. Homi Bhabha captures this quite well when he writes that:

An important feature of colonial discourse is its

*dependence* on the concept of 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness. Fixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition. Likewise the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated...<sup>8</sup> (my emphasis)

This anxious repetition finds itself inscribed again and again in the almost obsessive usage of old photographic images of Africans or in the ethnographic, tourist postcards depicting near-naked African women in a state of colonial arrest. The resulting work is redolent of a time past, if not one quite vanished. But it is the over-familiarity, and brazen usage of the photographs, many of which were undoubtedly found in curio shops, that attracts one's attention. The subjects, it seems, are attractive because of their anonymity and existence at the margins of history. They have no names, thus they pose the least emotional or ethical threat, and the distance between them and the artist offers a gratifying contextual licence to do with the images as one chooses.

Thus Penny Siopis turns the ubiquitous ethnographic postcard of 'native' women into large Cibachrome prints, then paints over them and drapes them with assorted paraphernalia, syringes, medical catheters, etc. The surfaces of the large photographs have been clearly worked on for effect, some parts highlighting and other parts covering or erasing certain telltale and problematic areas, an effect that recalls what Olu Oguibe has called the scarred page. By sentimentalising her images, Siopis turns them into over-aestheticised vessels for pleasurable consumption, untroubled and available. The images are just rendered as banal texts, as objective in their depictions as their usage as sources of art. The turn-of-the-century photograph of the doleful looking boy in a suit and hat and carrying an ostrich egg, Boy with Ostrich Egg, is one such image, that forms the larger repertoire of Siopis' fairly extensive incursions into this arena of racialised representation. The image has been recoloured blue and decorated with vertical borders of baby shoes. It is pure visual candy. The image says very little about the photograph, or who



Penny Siopsis, Boy with Ostrich Egg

the little boy is or the artist's relationship to the image. Instead what we are given is an aesthetic which reveals a curious ambivalence towards its subject as a social being and the historical impediments that frame his reception within the strategic restaging of African identity through the ghostly outline of its faded form.

Along the same spectrum, Wayne Barker puts such images on display at the Johannesburg Art Gallery as indigents, foils to the young artist Piet Pienaar's more revealing critique of identity, stereotype and essentialism. Gunther Herbst appropriates them as ethnographic kitsch symbols of the 'natives' western desire.

On the obverse side of this discourse is photographer Santu Mofokeng's ongoing project Black Photo Album/Look at Me: 1890-1950, a meditation on black desire and what it means to be black under colonial domination. Rather than make aesthetic interventions on the images to prove a point as author, he has instead, except for restoring the images, left the photographs as they are. In this sensitive recovery of the private history of black families from the colonial period and leading up to the early stages of apartheid, Mofokeng has ostensibly upset the apple-cart, in turn redeploying the archival images of black identity for the recovery of historical memory. By emphasising the historicity of the subjects who occupy the site of his exhaustive study, Mofokeng has painstakingly searched out the often elusive biographies of the sitters and their families. Their names form part of the larger task in what these images suggest for future usage. Perhaps it is best to listen to Mofokeng on this account. He writes that:

These are images that urban black working and middle-class families in South Africa had commissioned, requested or tacitly sanctioned. They have been left behind by dead relatives, where they sometimes hang on obscure parlour walls in the townships. In some families they are coveted as treasures, displacing totems in discursive narratives about identity, lineage, and personality. And because, to some people, photographs contain the 'shadow' of the subject, they are carefully guarded from the ill-will of witches and enemies... If the images are not unique, the individuals in them are... When we look at them we believe them, for they tell us a little about how these people imagined themselves. We see these images in terms determined by the subjects themselves, for they have them as their own."

What is clearly evident is Mofokeng's intention and insistence that the subject be seen as a person possessing a history, identity and desire. However, it must be understood that far from drawing a positivist sketch of noble Africans, Mofokeng is attempting to tease out an often elusive sense of black complexity in racialised discourse. Cast neither in the splintered light of deformity



Mofokeng, *Moduetha and Maria Letsipa*, silver bromide print. Refer to the caption below for Maria's background story. There is little information about her husband Moduetha. They came from the Orange Free State. Photographer unknown, circa 1900s.

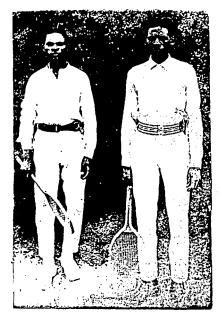


Mofokeng, Ouma Maria Letsipa and her daughter, Minkie Letsipa. Albumen print.

Maria was born to a family of 'inboekselings' in Lindley, Orange River Colony now called Orange Free State. Inboekseling loosely translated means forced juvenile apprenticeship in agriculture. Her family became prosperous livestock and grain farmers at the turn of the century. The image belongs to the Ramela family of Orlando East. This information was supplied by Emma Mothibe. Photo: Scholtz Studio, Linley. Orange River Colony c. 1900s.



Mofokeng, Cleophas and Martha Moatshe, albumen print. Cleophas and his wife Martha hail from Boshoek where he was a moderator in the break-away Anglican church. He died in 1923 from 'drie dae' influenza. This information is from Moatshe from Mohlakeng, Randfontein. Photographer: Unknown, Boshoek circa 1900s.

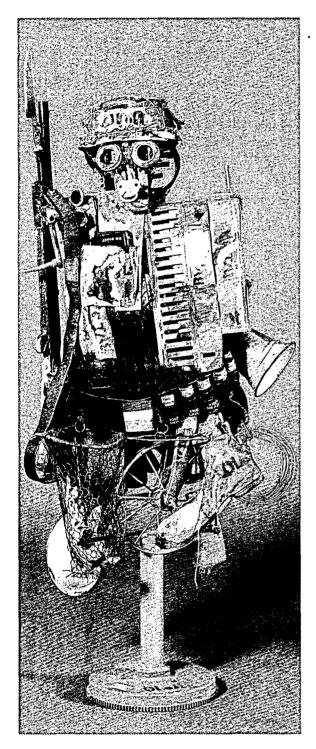


Mofokeng, *Moeti and Lazarus Fume*, silver bromide print. Biographical information is not known to our respondant, Emma Mothibe. The image belongs to the Ramela family of Orlando East, Soweto. Photographer unknown.

nor in the pathos of a curative nostalgia, his project provides us with an ethical sense of African agency, at least one of the ways it could be used imaginatively.

On the same level, Willie Bester's multimedia constructions carry the liminal images of the fight against apartheid with a brutal realism and situates the black body in the realm of his political struggle and social resistance. He fashions a critique in which the black subject is able to speak, to threaten, to be angry, and unbowed within the temporal and spatial history of South Africa. On the other hand Lien Botha memorialises that body's absence by fragmenting it, squaring it into a close-up in such a way that what we are offered are her sad eyes and mouth, simply an authentic image of suffering. In Krotoa's Room, she lights votive candles to the eternalisation of the object position of black people in South African history, signing her images, perhaps unknowingly, with the pure mark of the mute African, on whose behalf the metaphoricity, rather than the commensurability of her subjectivity, is pleaded for by another, by a surrogate voice. Botha's use of the black image recasts another stereotype, of the eternally grateful, eternally noble native, who, despite the most horrendous deprivation and dehumanisation, is incapable of hurting a fly.

For here, to represent the black subject like Bester does, in the violent midst of his struggle for emancipation from servitude and denigration, would be to pick up another slur, which is his enduring image as the uppity nigger, the smart-alecky kaffir, the rebellious native, the runaway, the maroon, the terrorist. It is this sense of radicality that made one of Ralph Ellison's characters in Invisible Man defiantly declare, "Black is... black ain't". For while the dominant trope and discursive address of the black subject by these artists is predicated on their overdetermined sense of familiarity of African identity, a sense thoroughly evoked by what Susan Vogel, to her eternal damnation, called "intimate outsiders", the black subject continues to elude the primary task of such discourse. A mode of discourse which seeks the normalisation of the power role of whiteness, as capable of historicising black desire, which the white artists today assign themselves.



Willie Bester, The Soldier, 1990, mixed media, 162 x 61 x 40 cm

IX

Such a position of power could be found in the much discussed exhibition 'Miscast: Negotiating the Presence of the Bushmen', curated by the artist Pipa Skotness at the National Gallery of South Africa in Cape Town, in April 1996. The exhibition, according to Skotness, was mounted to reveal the horrors which the 'Bushman' had suffered in southern Africa, at the hands of white settlers and Africans alike. In the exhibition Skotness assigned herself the role of historian, perhaps even custodian, of 'Bushman' history, so much so that not one African was invited in the catalogue of more than 15 white contributors to comment on a history in which Africans themselves are implicated. And neither was there a section in which the 'Bushman' was called to testify on his own behalf. Instead we get to hear his 'voice' only through the anecdotal voiceover of the white anthropologists commissioned to carry out the research which Skotness believes to be great material for exhibition in an art museum. As James Clifford has observed, "one increasingly common way to manifest the collaborative production of ethnographic knowledge is to quote regularly and at length from informants... Quotations are always staged by the quoter and tend to serve merely as examples or confirming testimonies".10

It is not however, the paternalistic framing of the 'Bushman' as a gentle, misunderstood creature hunted to extinction, in a commentary embellished by what Clifford calls "redemptive modes of textualisation", that disturbs the frame of this project. What disturbs the congruity of the frame is Skotness' attempt to make out of this history an artistic project. It seems as though this exhibition represented an opportunity for her to leap, full figured, into the arena of installation art.

Accompanying this creative exercise in curatorship is an attempt to stage authenticity through the metonymic presence of objects. So all through the gallery, Skotness had ransacked various ethnographic storerooms and in the process came up with musical instruments, bows and arrows, bits of ethnic paraphernalia such as bead work, old colonial photographs and old cameras (placed all around the room, surveillance style), anthropological documents, dissecting instruments in lit glass cabinets, and numerous shelves bearing cardboard boxes of concealed information of ethnographic expeditions (at least that's what the captions on the boxes suggested). She had moulds of decapitated body parts of the 'Bushman' cast in wax and displayed on pedestals.

Then, along two huge walls, she constructed a gridded mural of photocollages of the 'Bushman', in which she had interspersed and juxtaposed the photographs of various white people with those of the 'Bushman'. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this juxtaposition was the disjunction created between the white subjects and the 'Bushman'. Many of the photographs of the 'Bushman' gave one the eerie feeling of looking at images of police mug shots, thus tinting one's perception with the idea of staring at the faces of either criminals or condemned people. But what staged this disjunction so dramatically, was how totally at ease the white faces were in the panels, and how forbiddingly morbid the black ones. This did not so much blur the line between the hunter and hunted, between the coloniser and colonised, as it highlighted them, with quite surprising perversity.

Unaware, perhaps, of this perversity, is how the employed images have escorted her into the charnel house of an entirely submerged social history of photographic representation. That is, insofar as we are dealing with the archive as a signpost pointing to how difference and otherness constructed through are photographic practice. For what we were confronted with in the panels were two socially constructed positions of knowledge in pitched battle: the white man and the 'Bushman'. But Skotness' archive of images "contains subordinate, territorialised archives: archives whose semantic interdependence is normally obscured by the 'coherence' and 'mutual exclusivity' of the social groups registered within each"." As one wandered through the rooms, bludgeoned by a didactic relativism which at times seemed an act of ironic self mockery, I was forced to ask what this exhibition was all about. What was the exhibition actually saying, and to whom was it addressing its message? Certainly not to the 'Bushman' who, to the surprise of the curator and the institution, upset the cart by rejecting the message of the exhibition.

Part of the reason for this rejection was their refusal to recognise the body casts, and most especially the linoleum carpet embossed with photographic likenesses of their images, which Skotness had commissioned, as forming any kind of knowledge of their history or world. That we as viewers were invited, and often times acquiesced, actually to perform this reenactment, to walk or trample upon the abject figure of the 'Bushman' was most disturbing. But it was the 'Bushman's' complete rejection of the carpet that was the most memorable and damning event of the exhibition. Invited as special guests to the exhibition opening, the invitees were horrified at the sight of their images embossed on the linoleum carpet and refused to walk on it, effectively vitiating Skotness' attempt to serve as the sympathetic interlocutor of their history, indeed as their historian.

If we hold on to this critique, we will observe how Skotness' tactic as curator of this postmodern ethnography, took the role of a dilettante, neither ethnographer nor historian, neither member of the clan nor confidante nor intimate outsider. In her obsessiveness to raise emotional hackles (as if all we need do is think about the 'Bushman' with our hearts rather than heads), she neglected to take into account that her voice as the authority of history might indeed be contested by the very people she was attempting to recuperate. It is indicative of the ethical blinkers familiar to all redemptive colonial errands that her allegedly exhaustive consultation with the 'Bushman' community failed to alert her to the potential violation they may feel towards her work. For in reproducing this diapositive image of blackness, in which the historical memory of the 'Bushman' was desacralised and appropriated for a kind of colonialist exegesis, Skotness repeated the act of arrest of the native subject at the moment of his fall.

This refusal by the 'Bushman' to assist in the production of a distorted view of 'his' history indicates certain stances of oppositionality that sometimes are enacted by repressed groups in the face of misrepresentation. Bell hooks relates that the African American experience of repression under slavery, had produced in them "an over-whelming longing to look, a rebellious desire, an appositional gaze. By courageously looking [they] defiantly declared: 'Not only will I stare, I want my look to change reality'. Even in the worst circumstances of domination, the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency".<sup>12</sup> It was this failure to contain the gaze

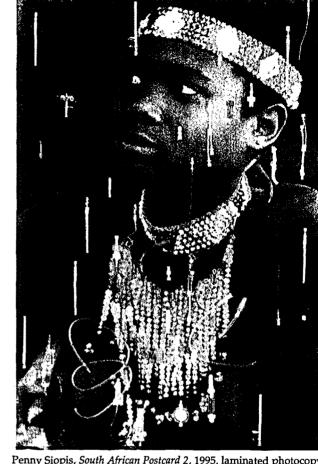
Durban, Johannesburg, Cape Town

of the 'Bushman', that caused the level of discomfort which still reverberates in the halls of the South African National Gallery.

It would seem that Skotness, as often is the case with white representations of African history, had assumed that as spectators, we all see the same thing, and thus believe that our gazes are constituted and therefore affirmed and defined by the same regime of looking. Such an assumption is not only simplistic, but reductive as well. As Manthia Diawara has suggested, under such a position, "the dominant reading compels the Black spectator to identify with racist inscription of Black character".<sup>13</sup> However, difficulty and anxiety arises when the gaze of the black spectator is accounted for, and ends up challenging representations which the white community might have deemed irrefutably conclusive. Penny Siopis, South African Postcard 2, 1995, laminated photocopy, oil paint, plastic medical objects, 114 x 76 cm

Therefore, when looking at white representations of African identity, we must allow that positions of spectatorship be recognised, particular in a racist society, as always conditioned by the economy of racialised interpretation, as well as desire.

It is the lack, therefore, and non-recognition of the place of the black spectator as an affirmed and enabled participant in the act of looking that burdens the work of the young artist Candice Breitz. In her 'Rainbow Series', a body of work which reminds one of Hannah Hoch's photomontages, particularly the ethnography series from around 1919, Breitz explores the tension that exists in the discursive territory of the 'Rainbow Nation' as they are rendered in the pornographic depiction of white women and the doubly coded depiction of the black female body, framed by both







Candice Breitz, from the Ghost Series, 1994-96, white-out, postcards and cibachrome, 152.4 x 101.6cm

pornographic and ethnographic desire.

Breitz stages this *mise-en-scène* through that most inimitable form of hybridity, collage, the errant pastiche of irresolvable miscegenation. She began by pulling images of white women from pages of porn magazines. Then she cut, ripped and collaged them with the most stereotypical images of bare-breasted and bare-footed South African black women, in 'ethnic' garb (in this case Ndebele blankets, beaded aprons, brass leg ornaments and beaded jewellery), taken from those tourist postcards familiar to frequent safari fliers. These crude joinings, some of which conflate the bodies of prepubescent black children with those of leering and sexually exposed white women are meant to enact an analogy of equal relationship and compatibility at the site of representation. The analogy being the equation of colonial ethnographic capture of the black body as the same as pornographic capture of white women. For example, the body of a young smiling girl, with barely sprouting breasts, and carrying a large pumpkin on her head was collaged to the faceless body of a squatting white woman wearing nothing but white shoes and socks and baring her vagina to us.

Another particularly striking image is a photograph of a ghostly pale Breitz reclining, odalisque style, like Manet's Olympia, and holding a cardboard cutout of a black woman's face, which partially frames and conceals her face. It is interesting that Breitz is represented full figured, while the black woman is rendered as a mask, a simulacrum to white feminine subjectivity. What are we to make of this degenerate form of African womanhood --without body, with-out name, the image of an image — except to see it as an object with which white femininity acquires its fullest enjoyment as subject? And what is it that Breitz is saying here that is of real interest to the African woman? Is she saying that this woman lives in the same temporal zone as the white woman? That they are both on the same level, as naive victims of masculine violence?

However, the props of Breitz's argument begin to wobble exactly on this level. She just simply cannot or is unable to tell us just what makes these images congruent, as forms of a charged and cohesive discourse of race, femininity, ethnography, pornography, the 'Rainbow Nation', and the complex web of entanglements that further undermine her thesis. A discursive absurdity, the images are often spliced and scanned through the produce large seductive computer to Cibachrome photographic prints. It seems that she is just too much in a hurry to show both her unimpeachable feminist credentials and her equally enlightened liberal sympathy towards the much abused African woman. Despite her effort to prove irrefutably that the bodies she so solicitously uses for her misguided narrative do indeed cohere, and do indeed accuse and reproach Mandela's 'Rainbow Nation', the black body speaking through Fanon's amanuensis arrives with a jarring retort to say: "You come too late, much too late. There will always be a world — a white world — between you and us."14

While such a Manichean scheme might irritate, what Fanon seems to be saying, that Breitz either missed or ignored, is the fact that not even gender could so suddenly bind together black and white women's bodies as equal partners against patriarchy in postapartheid South Africa. For white women must first recognise their own complicity in constructing the African subject as such. The vehement responses to this work by African women in South Africa and in the United States bear this out. The measure of this opposition to an all knowing, non-complicit whiteness in South Africa, is written within the dialectic of an empowered black feminine presence in the 'New South Africa'. What white representation disavows or disallows, through what Toni Morrison has called the stressed absence, black women aim to reify through a questioning and empowered voice. Perhaps to some ears, the ring of hostility to the obliterative act (whiting out. ghosting, decapitation, etc), the unwelcome overfamiliarity, bordering on ownership of the black body, the smug attitude towards lecturing those who have borne quite severely the sentence of these kinds of titillating attentions, might seem too harsh.

Inasmuch as the 'Rainbow Series' has been critically praised by the white establishment, with the protestations of African viewers dismissed as reactionary and emotional, such critical praise blissfully ignores that in Breitz's need to valorise and shift emphasis to the recognition of difference as the most plausible counteractive force to the homogenisation of South African identity by the 'Rainbow Nation' ideology, her work easily neglects the fact that, under apartheid, white women fought against African women. They failed to address the vast chasm that still separates black women from white women in South Africa, socially, economically, and in access to educational opportunities. These critics have either looked askance, or peremptorily dismissed, the objections of African women and the traumatic experiences of violation which images such as Breitz's new series reenacts for them, and which has been tendered for public display and consumption in the plush living rooms of white collectors. The principal responses either infantilise the African objection, or simply dismiss it as black hysteria. Perhaps one should neglect, as not being of critical importance, the comment of a black South African woman friend, who told me at Breitz's exhibition, how ashamed she was of her body. After seeing it depicted as it was she commented, rather ruefully, "is this the way they still see us". To

understand this comment, it is important to note that white women metaphorically sodomised and pornographicised black women by using their bodies as functional objects of labour, as domestic workers, as maids and nannies and wet nurses.

However, in issuing this injunction against Breitz's questionable representation of black women, one must not dismiss it merely by casting it in the ethical mind swamp of colonial mimicry. Nor simply damn it as another form of racist stereotype masquerading as liberal civilising mission. Bhabha provides a cogent example of how one may think of work of this nature. He writes that:

To judge the stereotyped image on the basis of a prior normativity is to dismiss it, not to displace it, which is only possible by engaging with its effectivity, with the repertoire of positions of power and resistance, domination and dependence that constructs colonial identification subject (both coloniser and colonized).<sup>15</sup>

My mind is called to attention here by an anecdote from bell hooks which encapsulates the sense of a narrative in which the black subject remains vividly etched on the margin, and is made secondary to white female desire. In the sudden discovery of the reciprocal relationship between the black domestic worker and her white mistress and employer, we are alerted to their common cause as equal partners as fighters against the castigating authority of the patriarchal 'Rainbow Nation'. Is it possible to read this situation as a glaring lapse, or is this a strategic discourse of whiteness that Breitz is constructing? Surely one must allow that the subjectivity and desire of white women is much attached and closer to white patriarchy and its desubjectivisation of both black men and women. Even in her submissive position, the white woman still does those colonial errands which denigrate black men and women, partly as a member of the tribe, partly to make the white fathers of the Broederbond happy.

Let us hear hooks' voice on the matter, so as to enlarge the spectrum with two questions, one by Freud and the other by Fanon, which confront the two worlds out of which feminine subjectivity projects in South Africa. Hooks relates an account that appeared in the newspaper USA Today which reads: "The Jefferson County Commission voted not to remove a courthouse mural of a white female plantation owner, looming over black men picking cotton".<sup>16</sup> She notes that the subject of the mural relates to how white femininity performs within white patriarchy to further marginalise the black subject, in an act of incestuous impulse, that she calls "Doing it for Daddy". Writes hooks in her critique of the mural, "No doubt the white woman in this mural is also doing it for daddy; performing an act of domination [of the black body] that she hopes will win his approval and love."<sup>17</sup>

This act of doing it for daddy, which hooks also refers to as the search by white women within patriarchy "to find ultimate pleasure, satisfaction, and fulfilment in the act of performance and submission",<sup>18</sup> is one crucial disjunctive element not at all accounted for in Breitz's work. Read in the shadow of this discourse, Freud's question, 'What does woman want?', and Fanon's archly patriarchal counter, 'What does the black man want?' loom quite large. For in each instance of the questions, it is the black woman that is disavowed, lodged in the lowest register of articulation. This aspect fascinates me, for the intersection of Freud and Fanon's questions as a description of the black woman's utter otherness could be interpellated to the kind of attention devoted to bisecting, colouring, whiting, ghosting out, morphing, collaging of the black figure within the field of representation. These acts seem to have the com-mon desire of enacting fantasies of whiteness, in which the black figure again returns for mediation as an anathema, as a hollow presence: seen and unseen.

### Χ

Despite the sincerity of the artists who have so far brazenly maintained a relationship in their work with the black body, there is a certain over-determination that accompanies their gestures. They seem to neglect the fact that the black form is as much a grotesque bearer of traumatised experiences as it is the abject vessel of race as a point of differentiation. More than alerting us to how the stereotype fixes its objects of desire in that freeze-frame of realism, as prior knowledge, the work of these artists exacerbates it by replaying the stereotype, perhaps unconsciously, as if it had always been factual. The problem with this kind of work is that it is so fixed on the body, that it neglects to account for the more crucial psychic split which positions black and white bodies in polarities of worth and value. By seeking to merge them, albeit forcibly, and taking as licence the fact of their whiteness, they repeat

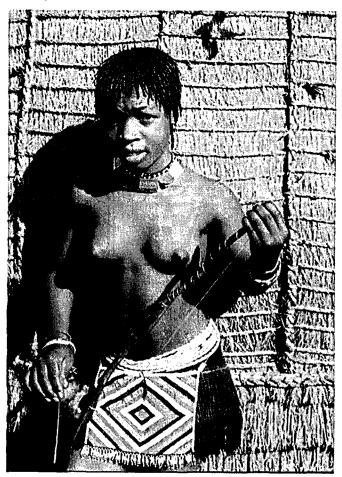
Candice Breitz, from the Rainbow Series, 1996

that act of surrogacy which emphasises the subject's muteness and silence, while embellishing their own positions as the voices of reality, as the vocal integers of truth.

While this attention, which grew out of the need to sate white liberal conscience in a fragile post-apartheid culture, persists, African artists have conversely adopted a contrary attitude towards the self-same body. There is very little usage of that figure in their work. Instead we encounter it as a suppressed presence, abstracted and exorbitantly coded with the semiotic speech of *détournement*, a kind of shift of emphasis from its representational 'realness' to a metaphorical search for its lost form.

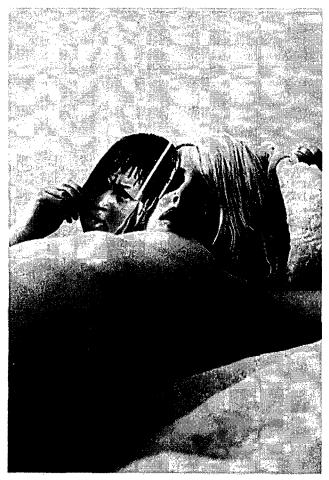
But in pointing out some of these problems,

Aubrey Elliot: Zulu Tribe - South Africa: Young unmarried Zulu girl in front of a typical Zulu grass hut, wearing a traditional beadwork grass skirt. The Zulu Tribe being the biggest tribe in South Africa. Copyright: Hillex Litho



are we not again fetishising identity as something that wholly belongs to and can be used only by a particular group? And am I not again reiterating that postcolonial litany of the wounded black subject, caught in the mesh of white, European displacement, who must again be either protected or spoken for? The fact that I am an African does not in itself absolve me from this quandary. Despite such dilemmas, what will be the implication of remaining silent on the matter? In proposing a re-examination of certain facts lodged in the iconographical heart of South Africa, in a delimited forum of whiteness as a nation unto itself, ought we not admit also that it is the reappropriation of blackness by Africans as a nationalistic

#### Candice Breitz, from the Rainbow Series, 1996



emblem, as a fantasy of the coherence of African identity, that has set up the appositional measures against the 'Rainbow Nation'?

But I remain sceptical of there being any possible resolution to the problems raised by these issues. I question the wisdom of enacting any kind of representational corrective through a recourse to 'positive' images of blackness. For identity must never be turned into a copyright; an antinomy in which ethnicity through group reckoning stages its authenticities and retains exclusive user rights of its images. To do so would be to fetishise identity, to render it into a totem, a token of mythology, an ideological fantasy. Moreover, we would miss the vital lessons which inform the complex motives of usage and reasons why we resist such usage of

Candice Breitz, from the Whiteface Series, 1996, 152.4 x 101.6cm



images. The predicament into which one is thrown, then, is how to imagine identity in the present tense of South Africa's transitional reshaping and reconstitution of its reality; between authenticity and stereotype. For everything seem so haunted by this paradoxical affirmation of origin and a disavowal of past histories. Within all that, what needs interrogation is usage of any fixed meaning of blackness as an ideology of authenticity, or whiteness as a surplus enjoyment of superiority. Whatever orientation, the whatever the signifying strategies of usage, either to mask whiteness or to valorise falsely an atrophied and immobile black identity, we would do well to heed Aimé Césaire's refusal to fix blackness in any stable meaning. Césaire, in his seminal epic Cahier d'un retour au pays natal (Notebook of a Return to my Native Land), wrote in one of the most moving lines of his poem that:

my negritude is neither tower nor cathedral it takes root in the red flesh of the soil it takes root in the ardent flesh of the sky

What Césaire is articulating here, far from being a fantasy of blackness, is an enunciatory proposition of heterogeneity, in which he casts aside all those fantasies which fetishise blackness in such a way that it loses its human dimension. My negritude is neither tower nor *cathedral*. Black is, black ain't: are there any more succinct ways to begin the delimitation of those fantasies which abjectionally mark the black subject than to start with those two ideas of unfixed blackness, burgeoning into the expansive site of heterogeneity? I want to end with this question, because the relationship of the white or black artist to the black body is indeed paradoxical. And the less anxiously repeated the image, the better the opportunity to find an ethical ground to use its index as a form of discursive address, for radical revision, as well as to unsettle the apparatus of power which employs it as a structurally codified narrative of dysfunction.

- Claire Kahane, 'Object Relations Theory', in Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1992, p 284; quoted by David Sibley in Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West, Routledge, London and New York, 1996, p 5.
- 2 Olu Oguibe, 'Art, Identity, Boundaries', Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art, Fall/Winter 1995, p 26.

- 3 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S Roudiez, Columbia University Press, New York, 1982, p 4.
- 4 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington, Grove Press, New York, 1963, p 39.
- 5 Rob Nixon, 'Of Balkans and Bantustans', *Transition*, No 60, Oxford University Press, 1993, p 25.
- While on the surface the challenges to the 'Rainbow 6 Nation' as a unitary polity might seem like a defence of pluralism, difference and heterogeneity, in reality they seem to recast a neo-conservative stance which echoes the divisive Bantustan policy of separate development of the apartheid regime. For what the critics fear and have failed to admit, at least explicitly, are the prospects of whiteness in an overwhelmingly 'black' South African country. Hence, the maintenance of ethnic, racial and linguistic faultlines seem the best check against an encroaching Africanisation of South Africa. In fact, the extreme right wing have ceased on such arguments and fears of Africanisation to demand an outright white Bantustan (homeland) for Afrikaners, and the Inkatha Freedom Party has adopted the neo-biologism of Zulu ethnicity to make an appeal for what its leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi has dubbed the 'Yugoslav option' for KwaZulu. See, in addition, Rob Nixon's brilliant essay (ibid) for a more in depth study of these contestations.
- 7 This issue was echoes by Mahmood Mamdani, the Tanzania-born chairperson of the Department of African Studies at the University of Cape Town. In the discussions that surrounded the conference, Mamdani had asked whether the desire to form an organisation to promote Afrikaans was not an attempt "by the privileged but displaced section to recruit foot soldiers from its less fortunate cultural cousin to strengthen a bid to retain some privileges and regain others?" Neville Alexander, one of the speakers at the conference, also placed himself at a distance from the nationalistic intonation which aspects of the conference carried by insisting that "if people want to form this kind of movement to protect a specific language, they must accept the consequences". But the entire debate, as it relates to the concept of the multicultural universe of equal access of all cultures of the 'Rainbow Nation', was phrased most effectively by Antjie Krof who stated "that if this meant standing shoulder to shoulder with Afrikaners whose motives were anti-government, anti-ANC, anti-truth commission and anti-nation building, then she would have none of it". All quotes taken from 'Afrikaans takes a wary step into the future', an article by Chris Barron, in the Sunday Times, December 8, 1996, p 8.
- 8 Homi Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, Routledge, New York and London, 1994, p 66.
- 9 Santu Mofokeng, 'Black Photo Album/Look at Me: 1890-1900s', Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art, Spring 1996, p 54.
- 10 James Clifford, The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth

Century Ethnography, Literature and Art, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1988, p 50.

- Allan Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive', in *The* Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography, (ed) Richard Bolton, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1989, p 347.
- 12 bell hooks, 'The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators', in *Black American Cinema*, (ed) Manthia Diawara, Routledge, London and New York, 1993, pp 288–289.
- 13 Manthia Diawara, 'Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance', in ibid, p 213.
- 14 Fanon, op cit.
- 15 Bhabha, op cit.
- 16 bell hooks, 'Doing it for Daddy', in Constructing Masculinity, (eds) Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis and Simon Watson, Routledge, New York, 1996, p 99.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Ibid.