Violent Aesthetics in Whiteness

The Representation of Violence in Michael MacGarry's *Race of Man*

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Content

Introduction

In his dissertation *Pots of Gold? The representation of identity in contemporary South African art at the end of the Rainbow Nation* of 2005 Keith Paul Godfrey devotes a sizable chapter to the work and life of the white South African artist Kendell Geers (1968), who has been living in Belgium since 2000. Amongst others he discusses Geers' work *Title Withheld (Nek)* (1998), in an earlier version also known under the title *Self-Portrait* (1995), consisting of a broken neck of a Heineken beer bottle[1] (fig. 1). The object itself easily interpreted as a symbol of violence, Godfrey also takes note of the provenance of Heineken, as it says on the bottleneck's label "Made in Holland." According to Godfrey Geers presents with *Title Withheld (Nek)* "the dilemma of the Afrikaner[2]." Generally Godfrey touches a sensitive point in the interpretation of *Title Withheld (Nek)*: the historical relations between South Africa and Europe in general and the Netherlands in particular[3]. Godfrey also sees in the Dutch beer brand marked "Made in Holland" in *Title Withheld (Nek)* the idea of a re-invented originally European, specifically Dutch identity in Africa[4]. Godfrey refers to the different uses the beer bottle and the bottle neck have got in South Africa as compared to the evolution and history of the Dutch in South Africa. He points to the use of a broken beer bottle in South Africa in smoking tobacco or marihuana but also and specifically "as a potentially lethal weapon[5]." The work and its title connect the object and Geers himself to the violent colonial history of South Africa.

This short assessment of one work by a white South African artist already shows the problematic position of looking at South African art from a West European point of view. There is an uncomfortable kinship toward the descendants of Europeans in South Africa that blurs the mind, especially when a white South African artist stresses his roots and history in his work. It is not a sense of shame or guilt but an emotional acknowledgement of the historic facts and sensitivities. South Africa is a 'post-colony' with the descendants of its colonisers still living in the country, albeit as a minority, but a very influential one. It forces the West European to recognise that uncomfortable kinship, but in

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[1] Godfrey 2005, pp. 175-177. The difference between the two versions is that in *Title Withheld (Nek)* the top of the bottle is standing on its opening, with the broken part upwards. In this version there is indeed the idea of a 'neck' from which the head is broken off. In *Self-Portrait* the broken bottle top is lying on its side in a glass case.

[2] Godfrey 2005, p. 177. In an interview in *Art Dependance* by Anna Savitskaya on 17 Ocober 2014, Geers tells that identity in the case of a white Afrikaner in post-apartheid South Africa has become problematic and self-loathing has become a part of that historical identity. Literally he says the "broken bottle of beer speaks of identity as violence." See: https://www.artdependence.com/articles/make-art-like-love-interview-with-kendell-geers/ (last retrieved 21 May 2018).

[3] Godfrey 2005, p. 177. According to Godfrey the Afrikaners do not identify very much with their "Dutch and Flemish" descent, compared to other white South Africans and their 'motherlands'. It may be arguable in how far white Afrikaners do not identify with the Netherlands as a "motherland," as immigration from the Netherlands actually occurred until as recent as the 1960s and 70s.

[4] Godfrey 2005, p. 177.

[5] Godfrey 2005, pp. 175-176. Godfrey also suggests that the "Nek" in the title is an inversion of part of Kendell Geers' name, also making it a personal, conceptual work of art.

doing so it also enforces a kind of 'mental apartheid', in which white South Africans have become part and symbol of the violent involvement of Europeans in Africa, and where coloured and black South Africans are, consequentially, the 'others'.

There is however another way of looking at South Africa. Like in any post-colonial country in Africa, with its colonial borders, people, as a consequence of a long and extremely violent history, are sentenced to live together, whether they like it or not, within the framework of a common constitution, as one political entity. As such one could see South Africa as metaphoric for many parts of the world, both post-colonial and 'post-colonialist'. Globalisation has brought us the question how to live together in an increasingly interdependent world, a question which is reflected in local histories, which are, after all not local at all, but part of a globalisation that already started with the European expansion in the 16th century. That makes South Africa an interesting focus point to see how it is trying to deal with its violent past and, by consequence, its violent present.

Michael MacGarry (1978, Durban)[6] a white South African artist of a younger generation than Kendell Geers (of course amongst other South African artists) has shown a special interest in the position of the white man in the post-colonial world. Especially in his 2011 video loop *Race of Man* (fig. 2)[7] there is a strong connection between whiteness and violence. How does MacGarry, being of a younger generation who became adult practicing artists after the last and extremely violent years of apartheid (which was abolished in 1990), represent violence and its implications in a post-colonial South Africa in *Race of Man*? How can its violence be defined and interpreted against the background of post-apartheid South Africa?

The protagonists in it are two white men who are playing a video game, that is, they are playing it *and* they are part of it. It is immediately clear that one player has to be killed by the other, although at a certain moment they are surprised by a third (also white) man who is shooting at them with a gun but who is killed by one of the main characters with a rifle. The two men meet each other in a desert landscape but the actual killing takes place in an undefined, neutral area where the two men bind themselves with a rope to a pole (fig. 3), blind themselves with a cap and try to wound and kill each other. At a certain moment they take off their hoods, one shoots the other and, while dying, the other stabs the first one with a knife. The first one, seemingly dying as well, shoots the other again through the brains and sucks the wound in his head. All together this is not a film for the fainthearted.

Assessing how violence and the consequences of its meanings are represented in MacGarry's *Race of Man* will of course give no general answers to how South Africa is dealing with past and present violence (that would need a completely different research), but it may at least give an insight of how a younger white South African artist is dealing with the question in one work.

To assess the work it is important to first find a definition of violence. At first sight the question of what violence is, seems to be simply answered, because, surely, anybody is able to recognise violence when it is perpetrated. Or is he/she? When looking at *Race of Man* (or even at Geers' *Title Withheld (Nek)*) it is obvious that this work has something to do with violence as there is killing and

[6] See Appendix on page 37 for a short biography and description of his work.

[7] Having obtained a copy of the video from the artist, I have included a few stills from *Race of Man*.

shooting in the work, but is that the only violent aspect in it? So, what is exactly violent about Race of Man? To answer this question I will take a closer look in the first chapter at the general meaning of the word 'violence' and to sociologist Johan Galtung's analysis of what violence is, how it can be defined, and especially to his theory of personal and structural violence. I will also try to assess what the meaning of violence is in a post-colonial country like South Africa, following philosopher Achille Mbembe's ideas about the post-colony.

In the second chapter I will make a comparison between MacGarry's *Race of Man* and the work of another even younger South African artist: the performance *Ke Kgomo ya moshate* (fig. 4) of 2016 by black artist Mohau Modisakeng (Soweto, 1986). *Ke kgomo ya moshate*[8] also involves explicit violence and three persons, however they are black persons and the work deals with blackness in a post-colonial society. Three black actors are clad in black trousers and white shirts and the whole scene is set in black and white. Two actors, each holding a machete in his hand, greet each other ceremonially by grinding their machetes and formally take a seat on the opposite ends of a table. There is a glass for each on the table and in the middle is a decanter with a dark liquid. Each formally serves the other by pouring out some of the black liquid for the other. They reach over the table to toast and then drink. After some time a third man, a kind of waiter with a white apron – in fact the artist himself –, empties a sack of charcoal on the table in between the two drinking men. Picking pieces of charcoal by the two men soon results in open greed. More servings of charcoal do not help the situation positively – on the contrary – and the two men are menacing each other with the machetes. Toward the end of the performance the two men turn the table and generally make a mass, tarnishing each other's and their own white shirts with coal dust.

In the third chapter I will compare *Race of Man* with a much older work of art also by a white artist, *Butcher Boys* (1985/86) by Jane Alexander (Johannesburg, 1959) (fig. 5). The work, made of painted plaster, bone and horns and sitting on a wooden bench, was made during the last and extremely violent period of the apartheid era. It is a sculpture – on show in the National Gallery of Arts in Cape Town – depicting three life size white men, or rather creatures, as they also have animal like features like horns, sitting on a bench. While being made in one of the bloodiest periods of South African recent history the work itself does not show explicit violence. I will discuss the implications for the viewer as compared with *Race of Man*. As such I will argue that there is a difference in aesthetics in the representation of violence in these works of different periods.

A hurdle to be taken is the relative lack of critical or scientific publications about modern and present day South African art, let alone the subject of violence in art in general and in South Africa in particular. The last decade South African artists have become more prominent on the international stage, but as such they are presented as new, and most texts are written to get the audience and potential buyers acquainted with the artists. The most valuable publication is the four volume work

[8] The performance was on 27 February 2016 as the opening of Modisakeng's solo exhibition *Endabeni* at Ron Mandos gallery, Amsterdam. The performance *Ke Kgomo ya moshate* can be seen online on Vimeo on the channel of Ron Mandos gallery: https://vimeo.com/157566486 (last retrieved 20 May 2018).

Visual Century: South African Art in Context[9]. In its fourth volume the period from 1990 to 2007 is assessed in different essays. These essays are important in that they not just describe South African art history but also focus on art works contextually and critically. Gavin Jantjes, the project director and one of the editors of *Visual Century*, notices three main themes in South African art around the turn of the century: cultural and sexual identities, revision of history and evolution of culture[10]. Indeed the volume focuses very much on these themes. Violence is often mentioned in it, although no specific essay is devoted to violence. In a way that is remarkable as the country has been shaped by violence and is still feeling its aftershocks. Artist and art historian Colin Richards is one of the very few who has explicitly devoted an article to violence in contemporary South African art in general ('Aftermath: Value and Violence in Contemporary South African Art') in the essay collection *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*[11]. Another valuable publication is the recent book *In the World: Essays on Contemporary South African Art* by Ashraf Jamal. Jamal focuses in twenty-four essays on as many South African artists, both lesser and better known. He pays attention comprehensively to recent works of the artists and tries to put them in a wider and critical context, which is quite refreshing, but, again, violence is not specifically focussed, although in discussing a work by Mohau Modisakeng he does delve more into violence and post-colonialism[12].

Further on it has proven to be essential to read some books about South Africa not as referential works but to obtain more feeling with the subject. I would especially like to mention and recommend the novel *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001) by K. Sello Duiker and the partly journalistic, partly personal *Country of my Skull* (1998) by Antjie Krog. *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* is a partly hallucinating, partly psychological and sometimes even picaresque novel, taking place in post-apartheid Cape Town and dealing with the ambiguity of the past of the different people that appear in the narrative which disturbs their present, their dreams and their expectations in which love and hate blur. It gives a haunting insight in both material and spiritual life and mutual relationships in a post-colony. *Country of my Skull* is a partly journalistic chronicle of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission[13] interspersed with personal observations, remembrances and background stories, which gives an idea of the awkward position of the white Afrikaner journalist who listens to what people of her own 'tribe' have committed. Apart from that it also tells about unfulfilled expectations of forgiving and the impunity of the responsible former authorities and their arrogance. It lays bare the seemingly incurable wounds of South African society and the pain that still traumatises it. However, Krog lived as a white adult during the apartheid era and she reflects on it with the knowledge of the deeds of her

[9] All four volumes together cover one century from 1907 to 2007.

[10] Jantjes 2011, p. 43.

[11] Richards 2008, pp. 250-289.

[12] Jamal 2017, pp. 178-193.

[13] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) started its hearings in 1996 and was meant as a tool to find reconciliation after the violent years of apartheid. Perpetrators of serious human rights crimes were urged to confess.

own white ‘tribe’, and, like Kendell Geers feeling to an extent complicit, while Michael MacGarry inherited that world without having been complicit, but with the notion of being a white male in South Africa.

My research into his *Race of Man* concentrates on the visual analyses of the work of art itself and the works I compare it with, as well as sources from literature in the field of art history as well as sociology, especially Galtung and his theory about personal and structural violence and political theory, as well as Mbembe and his ideas about the post-colony.

Chapter 1. Violence in a post-colonial country

Violence has different contexts in different countries which reflects, of course, in the arts locally. To mention only two examples in the Netherlands, Armando's works about the 'guilty landscape' (fig. 6) reflect on violence that once took place during the German occupation of the Netherlands, while Ronald Ophuis confronts the viewer of his paintings with violence mainly elsewhere in the world (fig. 7). One could say Armando's *Guilty Landscapes* are representations of a trauma. His works do not show the violence itself, they reflect on the fact that the violence actually took place in certain locations and that the spirit of violence still lingers. Ophuis, on the other hand, challenges the viewer to relate to both victims and perpetrators. Although his barbaric scenes are often set in other countries, to the viewer they may be a reminder that barbarism and violence are part of the human condition anywhere in the world, including in the Netherlands.

The differences between Armando's and Ophuis' works are obvious: Armando does not actually show violence, while his titles and context refer to it, and Ophuis in many of his works bluntly shows violence and its direct consequences of suffering. Armando *shows* a trauma and Ophuis *makes* a trauma. Both artists' works demonstrate that violence plays a role even in a seemingly peaceful society like the Dutch. History and remembrance are part of that representation, like in Armando's works, but also the feeling of pain, psychologically or almost corporeally, is an important agent, like in Ophuis' paintings.

Another aspect in works by both artists is that there are victims and perpetrators, although not always visibly present, – in Amando's works the German occupiers and their Dutch victims, and in Ophuis' works there are supposedly barbaric people and the people who suffer from their violence – but they are not simply shown as 'the good and the bad' but as people or communities we may all be part of[14]. Clearly to both Armando and Ophuis the question of who is good and who is bad is not an important one. Rather the idea of how violence arises and how it works and how it can be constrained in our minds, how it is a human mechanism that can be instated or unleashed seems to be a more meaningful question in their works. In MacGarry's *Race of Man* that idea does not seem to be that important. Indeed his protagonists are both victims and perpetrators at the same time. Although the end of *Race of Man* may look as bloody as some of Ophuis' paintings do, there is no sense of barbarism in it.

It is generally difficult to say something absolute about the safety, peacefulness or the amount of violence in any country, yet we all see that one country may be dangerous as it is at war, while another country looks perfectly safe. Like many other African countries South Africa has had a long and violent colonial history, but unlike many of these countries it has taken active steps to reconcile

[14] In an account of a discussion with Ophuis in web magazine Mister Motley he says: "(....) slachtofferschap is niet heilig. Sterker nog, als alles corrupt is om je heen is het moeilijk om je rug recht te houden. Hoe zuiver kun je zelf blijven, als alle beschaving om je heen wegvalt?" ([….] victimhood is not holy. Moreover, if everything around you is corrupt it is difficult to keep your back straight. How sincere can you be yourself, if all civilization around you is falling apart?") Report by Sophie Smeets, 11 May 2018, http://www.mistermotley.nl/art-everyday-life/waar-we-toe-staat-zijn (last retrieved 16 May 2018).

with the past. An active democracy with majority rule and regular elections for national and local authorities was established as was the rule of law with an independent judiciary, which both have been maintained so far. So, compared to for instance the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where the population has suffered from ongoing violence throughout both the colonial and post-colonial periods[15], South Africa looks like a success story. Although South Africa has been an independent country since 1931[16], it gained majority rule with the 1994 elections, when Nelson Mandela was elected as the first black president of the country. Mandela seemed to be more than fair toward the white South African population and under his regime the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was installed[17].

Before assessing violence in South Africa it is necessary to take a closer look at violence itself. What exactly is violence? There are different interpretations of the meaning of the word itself. The Cambridge Dictionary has two very short definitions: 1. "actions or words that are intended to hurt people;" 2. "extreme force[18]." The dictionary does not give an explanation of "words that are intended to hurt people" but the use of both "actions" *and* "words" makes the definition quite broad. It becomes even broader because it does not define "hurt." One can hurt somebody physically and/or psychologically. "Extreme force" also includes natural forces like a storm, but that meaning is of course not important in this argument. Merriam-Webster's dictionary is more elaborate about violence and gives more definitions: "1a: the use of physical force so as to injure, abuse, damage, or destroy; b: an instance of violent treatment or procedure; 2: injury by or as if by distortion, infringement, or profanation: outrage; 3a: intense, turbulent, or furious and often destructive action or force; (....) b: vehement feeling or expression: fervor; also: an instance of such action or feeling; c: a clashing or jarring quality: discordance; 4: undue alteration (as of wording and sense in editing a text)[19]." Apart from the elaboration on "physical force" it is interesting to see how much attention is given to more abstract or less physical definitions of violence. Already in the second definition it is not just "injury by (....) distortion, infringement, or profanation," but also "as if by." So the "distortion, infringement, or profanation" may take place to cause injury, but the "distortion, infringement, or profanation" may also *seem* to take place. Very interesting are the definitions under 3. According to 3a the violent "action of force" is "often destructive," which means such an action may in some cases *not* be destructive. Violence may also be (3b) a "vehement feeling or expression." This suggests that violence may not

[15] From 1885 to 1960, the DRC was a Belgian colony ruled with oppression and violence. From independence until the present the DRC suffered from political turmoil, kleptocratic rule, oppression and local and international warfare.

[16] It became independent from the United Kingdom, but remained in the Commonwealth, with the British monarch as head of state. In 1961 South Africa became a republic.

[17] See note 13 in the Introduction.

[18] Cambridge Dictionary web site: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/violence (last retrieved 17 May 2018).

[19] Merriam-Webster Dictionary web site: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/violence (last retrieved 17 May 2018).

always be physically harmful or intended to harm. The “feeling or expression” itself may be called violence, which brings this definition close to art as a way of expression, while also the “instance of such (....) feeling” may be called violence. The word violence may also be used for “a clashing or jarring quality,” which also shows that violence needs not always (and maybe even in many cases) be something physical.

Even though these defining notes on violence are elaborate and quite clear, what is the background and context of these definitions, also in order to recognise the more ‘invisible’ kinds of violence? (I put invisible between inverted commas as I am almost by definition talking about visibility). Sociologist, political scientist and founder of the discipline of peace and conflict studies Johan Galtung in his influential essay ‘Violence, Peace and Peace Research’ of 1969, poses violence against peace to define both in a social context[20]. He argues that if there is peace in a society it means there is an absence of violence, but he acknowledges that that still denies certain forms of violence; as he concludes: “Highly unacceptable social orders would still be compatible with peace[21].” According to Galtung time and place are also important to define and recognise violence. He gives the example of somebody who died of tuberculosis in the eighteenth century. That cannot be defined as violence, he argues, as there was no medical treatment for the disease and as such it was fatal. However, today tuberculosis is treatable and death by it can be seen as a denial of medical treatment and as such as violence[22]. About the relationship of actuality and potentiality of inflicted harm Galtung gives the following rule: “(....) when the potential is higher than the actual is by definition *avoidable* [italics by Galtung] and when it is avoidable, then violence is present[23].” Galtung also indicates that it has to do with certain values in society which may or may not be open to different groups or individuals in that society. As an example he mentions literacy, which is held in high esteem in almost all societies, while for instance being Christian may be valued controversial. If the level of literacy is lower, the degree of violence could be estimated higher while if the level of Christianity would be low, that would not be regarded as (a result of) violence[24].

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[20] Johan Galtung in his 1969 essay ‘Violence, Peace and Peace Research’ coined the term “structural violence,” as compared to “personal violence.” His essay is essentially about peace research but it starts with an assessment of the nature of violence and how it can be defined and recognised. It is short but quite comprehensive in analyzing the workings of violence and analyzing the roles of subject, object and action.

[21] Galtung 1969, p. 168.

[22] Galtung 1969, p. 168.

[23] Galtung 1969, p. 169. At first sight this seems to be a somewhat hermetic statement. For instance: when a tuberculosis sufferer would die now, so when the potentiality of dying is high (the potential), while his/her death would be avoidable now (the actual), his/her death is actually avoidable; so, if avoiding does not happen, violence is present. In the 18th century the potential was also high, but the actual was not as high as death by tuberculosis was not avoidable; so in the 18th century in this case the potential was lower than the actual was avoidable, so violence was not present.

[24] Galtung 1969, p. 169.

Basically Galtung distinguishes three entities in, what he calls the "influence relationship" in violence: the influencer or subject, the influencee or object and the influencing or action. He recognises however that these three entities need not always be as clear or present to define violence[25]. As we have to deal with a certain amount or a certain quality of visibility of violence in the visual arts, as for instance violence is clearly being committed in MacGarry's *Race of Man*, but not in Alexander's *Butcher Boys*, it is important to take a closer look at how the three entities do or do not relate to each other. Galtung is quite systematic about this in his essay. According to him there are six distinctive differences in the interpretation of violence: first, between physical and psychological violence; second, between negative and positive violence; third, between violence with or without an object that is hurt; fourth, between violence with or without a subject that acts; fifth, between intended and unintended violence and sixth, between manifest and latent violence[26]. According to Galtung these six dichotomies are by no means exhaustive, but it seems to me he has made a very useful classification as to the roles of subject, object and action.

The modern history of South Africa can be seen as a situation in which people lived under a set of rules, customs and laws (the apartheid system) which changed to another set of laws in the 1990s. However, the fact that a great part of the South African black population is still poverty stricken in spite of black majority rule, indicates that a potential violent situation still exists. To put it more bluntly: the fact that a great part of the black population is denied access to a more comfortable and healthier way of life in a country that is in itself not economically poor, could be called violent. Although there are clearly sometimes outbreaks of physical violence[27] in South Africa which can be related to these circumstances, the general acceptable modus is – of course – one without physical violence[28]. Defining such circumstances as violent refers to Galtung's fourth dichotomy: violence with or without a subject that acts. Galtung defines violence with an acting subject as "personal or direct" violence, and violence without an acting subject as "structural or indirect" violence[29]. Especially the term "structural violence" has become widely used since Galtung introduced it. In his commentary about structural violence Galtung explains that for instance unevenly distributed resources in a society and especially

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[25] Galtung 1969, p. 169. "A complete influence relation presupposes an influencer, an influencee, and a mode of influencing. In the case of persons, we can put it very simply: a *subject*, an *object*, and an *action*. But this conception of violence in terms of a *complete* interpersonal influence relation will lead us astray by focusing on a very special type of violence only; also *truncated* versions where either subject or object or both are absent are highly significant." (italics by Galtung).

[26] Galtung 1969, pp. 169-172.

[27] For example the last few years there has been violence against foreigners from other African countries. Another case is the so called Marikana Massacre in which 34 miners were killed in violent clashes between striking workers, security personnel and police.

[28] Of course in talking about "the general acceptable modus" it is already difficult to leave out the history of apartheid in which "the general acceptable modus" was an explicitly violent one. Switching just from one modus to another may have proven not as easy as it was supposed to be. The promised social freedom and justice did not come easily, and many feel they did not come (sufficiently) to them, while a minority retained its privileged position and only a new minority gained new privileges.

[29] Galtung 1969, pp. 170-171.

the power to decide over the distribution of resources can be a base point for structural violence[30]. If for instance people actually starve in a place and time where they can be fed but where access to that food is denied to them, either on purpose or not, one can speak of structural violence and the same accounts for the deprivation of other amenities that are regarded as basic to human health and development. This means that a definition of violence becomes even wider. On the other hand, wide though the definition seems to have become, it may not necessarily mean that all works of art that convey any social or political criticism in a country like South Africa (or in any other country for that matter) deal with or visualise violence in one way or another.

Any kind of statehood will have to deal with the problem of violence, but what, in a state, is defined as violence and who is allowed to use it and for which reasons? To be more specific: how can we see violence in context in a post-colonial country like South Africa? All violence has a reason, though more often than not an unfair one, and, according to the law of the state, not always a legal one. Usually the authorities of a state have the exclusive right to violence. Writing about colonial and postcolonial violence Cameroonian philosopher and political theorist Achille Mbembe explains in *On the Post-colony* that postcolonial authorities' knowledge of government "is the product of several cultures, heritages, and traditions of which the features have become entangled overtime, to the point where something has emerged that has the look of 'custom' without being reducible to it, and partakes of 'modernity' without being wholly included in it[31]." This may seem already striking when also looking at postcolonial art from many African countries in which artists have been struggling with this entanglement of "cultures, heritages, and traditions," in which their originality was questioned both in their own newly independent countries as in the countries of the former colonisers[32].

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[30] Galtung 1969, p. 171. "Violence without this [subject-object] relation is structural, built into structure. Thus, when one husband beats his wife there is a clear case of personal violence, but when one million husbands keep one million wives in ignorance there is structural violence. Correspondingly, in a society where life expectancy is twice as high in the upper as in the lower classes, violence is exercised even if there are no concrete actors one can point to directly attacking others, as when one person kills another."

[31] Mbembe 2001, pp. 24-25.

[32] An example: When I visited a workshop for artists of different countries (there were artists taking part from Zambia, Zimbabwe , Malawi, Sweden and the Netherlands) at the University of Zambia (UNZA), Lusaka in 1982, it was clearly organised to help develop Zambian art to become more contemporary without losing its own characteristics, or maybe rather, by finding new characteristics. Organiser was resident artist of UNZA, appointed by the then Zambian president Kaunda, the artist Henry Tayali (1943-1987) and he was fierce in his criticism towards his African colleagues in that they were either too traditional or too Western-modern. The traditional would not bring them back to their own ways of expression but instead to the kind of primitivism that would be expected from them by Western tourists, while Western style modernism was something of the West and it was no use competing with it. This clearly illustrated, at least to me, the predicament of young artists in a former colonial country like Zambia at that time. At the time Zambia had been independent from Britain for eighteen years.

"Colonial rationality," as Mbembe calls it, is part of that knowledge of the postcolonial government[33]. According to Mbembe colonial authorities used violence in three ways: firstly as what he calls "founding violence," secondly the violence of the legitimisation of the colonisation or "conquest" (as Mbembe describes it) and thirdly the violence of assurance of the authorities' "maintenance, spread, and permanence." Mbembe stresses that the "colonial rationality," as part of what he calls "*commandement*" is an "*imaginary* of state sovereignty[34]." He claims that the third kind of violence (violence of assurance) played such an influential role in all nerves of society that it "ended up the central cultural *imaginary* that the state shared with society, and thus had an authenticating and reiterating function[35]." Recapitulating the influence of the violence of colonialism Mbembe writes: "The violence insinuates itself into the economy, domestic life, language, consciousness. It does more than penetrate every space: it pursues the colonized even in sleep and dream. It produces a culture; it is a cultural praxis[36]." Describing colonialism one might say, recalling Galtung, that the colonisers were the subjects or influencers, the colonised the objects or influencees and the colonisation was the action or influencing. To have *commandement*, Mbembe explains, it was important for the colonisers to use physical, or in Galtung's words "personal" violence, both as a means of *commandement* and as a deterrent in any aspect of the personal life of the colonised subject. In that way personal violence also became structural violence, as the use of personal violence towards the colonised was always possible. It completely uprooted societies of the colonised territories (in that respect I already mentioned the DRC as an extreme example). Commercial companies of the colonising countries extracted raw materials and cash-crops from the colonies, and the colonial political system forced the local people, the "natives," in a violent way to co-operate in that work and in that system. As for South Africa commercial colonial companies like Cecil Rhodes' De Beers mining company, by their allegiance to the British state, determined the colonial system in a territory, present day South Africa and beyond – as the Dutch East India Company did in the 17th and 18th centuries in the Cape for the Dutch Republic –. Mbembe stresses that this kind of what he calls "unprecedented" privatisation of public prerogatives together with the "socialization of arbitrariness" – with which this privatisation in the colonial system was politically and judicially implemented – as a way of *commandement*, was part of the understanding of government of postcolonial rulers in Africa[37]. Mbembe even says it was "the cement of postcolonial African authoritarian regimes," but my point is that it also applies to less

[33] Mbembe 2001, p. 25.

[34] Mbembe 2001, p. 25.

[35] Mbembe 2001, p. 25.

[36] Mbembe 2001, p. 175.

[37] Mbembe 2001, p.32.

authoritarian, or officially not-authoritarian regimes, like the South African in which for instance the present president Cyril Ramaphosa was managerially involved in the Marikana massacre[38]

Is this important to understanding South African art? I think it is. One should be aware of the systems in which artists grew up, which ideas they are familiar with by birth and education, which ideas they comply with and which they want to criticise or dispute. For a fairly new post-colonial country, which became politically only really post-colonial in the 1990s, it is all the more important to get some basic ideas of the role of violence of South Africa's colonial era. As I mentioned before, Mbembe describes the deprivation of almost everything from public to private life of the "natives" in the colonial territory. Mbembe compares the idea of the "native" to, what he calls "the prototype of the *animal*[39]." He sees two ways of animalisation of the colonised: a way in which the colonised becomes no more than an object that does not have the power of transcendence, it has drives but no capacities, it is regarded as "the property and *thing* of power," and as such it could be killed, mutilated or anything barbaric one would not do to a human being. One might say one would not perpetrate these barbarities to animals either, but there is the second way of animalisation Mbembe describes: the animal that, like a pet, needs sympathy and care, even friendship. he describes that as a process of taming, dressage or moulding in which the colonised becomes part of the familiar world of the coloniser, part of his/her daily life, while still remaining less human by being a serf[40]. Mbembe argues that "founding violence" contains the conquest by the colonisers itself and the arrogated right to that, the creation of the space over which violence was perpetrated and the implementation of law which abused and denied the rights of the natives[41]. As such this "founding violence" never abated during the colonial era, but also became part of the postcolonial idea of governance, and, again, it became part of the colonial and postcolonial culture. So, even in postcolonial days the founding violence of the coloniser penetrates the now postcolonial mind, whether or not in his/her "sleep and dream."

Mbembe also stresses that the colonial system was not just taken over by postcolonial governments. He explains how the colonial system itself was not as totally controlled by the colonising forces as one might expect. There came native middlemen in between native and colonising society, to help commerce, local administration and education. These middlemen were, in terms of power, either rooted traditionally in their local societies, or made themselves a reputation as such. They became part of the colonial system, but they were also important engines to decolonisation. Some of them became postcolonial rulers[42].

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[38] During the strike at the Marikana mine Ramaphosa, a former union leader, was advisor to the board of Lonmin, the owner of the mine. In that position he advised to bring in the police, ultimately leading to the bloody outcome that is now known as the Marikana massacre.

[39] Mbembe 2001, p.26.

[40] Mbembe 2001, pp. 26-27.

[41] Mbembe 2001, p. 25.

[42] Mbembe 2001, pp. 40-41.

Mbembe confines himself to a socio-economic and political history of the relation between colonialism and postcolonial rule. In his narrative he also tries to explain the, what he calls, "implosion" of African post-colonial states and policies. Such an "implosion" is of course, and as we may hope, not actually happening in South Africa, but elements of it can be seen. Mbembe describes graphically the falling apart of postcolonial African society. Where he says "The continuous erosion of living conditions now goes hand in hand with war, disease, epidemics," he is obviously not describing the situation in South Africa. Nevertheless he continues with: "The result is worsening civil dissension, the ever more frequent resort to ethnically, regionally, or religiously based mobilization, and the giddying rise in the chances of violent death," and that may sound regrettably more familiar when looking at South Africa[43]. One should however bear in mind that South African society now incorporates its former coloniser, the white community, which itself is split up between English speakers and Afrikaans speakers. Speaking about civil dissension in South Africa one may for instance refer to the differences between Xhosas and Zulus, but civil dissent between European and African descent is still easily incited or maybe even more easily as the landownership issue is still not resolved and as ideas of cultural and intellectual decolonisation have become an important driving force, not just of understandable protest and violence but also of dissent[44]. Further on one may also think of the bloody violence that broke out against African immigrants in South Africa in 2015.

Mbembe not just talks about failed states in Africa but also about the countries that were once thought to be politically and socially stable and relatively prosperous. Although he mentions its northern neighbour Zimbabwe he doesn't mention South Africa in that respect. Maybe South Africa was still too young by the time of writing (2000-2001) or too exceptional to mention, but some of the aspects described by Mbembe may apply to the country. Mbembe for instance writes about the "compromise" in these once stable postcolonial countries "guaranteeing the welfare of the middle classes and administrative elites." According to Mbembe "thanks to this compromise large sums could be exacted from agricultural surpluses and oil and mining rents." He tells how through violent means this made it possible to gain allegiance and loyalty at the expense of the economy[45]. One inadvertently

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[43] Mbembe 2001, p. 50. With "disease and epidemics" one may for instance think of different ebola outbreaks in West Africa and in May 2018 in de Democratic Republic of the Congo. However, as for South Africa, one may also think of the spread of HIV/AIDS in which the Mbeki government (1999-2008) only very slowly recognised that there was a correlation between HIV and AIDS, and extremely sluggishly made it possible that anti retroviral medicines became accessible to HIV positive patients.

[44] Much of the profitable agricultural land is still owned by white farmers and companies. Time and again the government is pressed to take measures to end that situation, in which different scenarios circle around. In terms of dissent one may of course also think of the recent students protests. Although there was already an earlier history of protests at smaller universities in South Africa, the protests against fees ('Fees Must Fall') at the bigger universities in for instance Johannesburg and Cape Town made headlines in the world news from 2015 onwards. Almost at the same time these protests evolved into protests in which decolonisation of academic education was demanded ('Rhodes Must Fall'). It is clear that white privilege in South Africa is seen by many students as coalescent with the new elite.

[45] Mbembe 2001, p. 51.

thinks of the corruption scandals around former president Zuma or the miners conflict at the Marikana mine.

Violence is a very wide ranging concept, not just for its diverse meanings but also in the analysis given by Johan Galtung. Galtung teaches amongst others about the influencing system with its three elements, the influencer, the influencee and the influencing. In for instance Michael MacGarry's *Race of Man* the protagonists are both influencers and influencees and as there are some acts of personal violence in the work there is clearly also influencing as will be discussed in the next chapter. However, in Jane Alexander's *Butcher Boys* there is, at first sight, no influencing, neither can the three protagonists easily be described as influencers or influencees as will ne elaborated on in the third chapter. Achille Mbembe stresses two important elements about the post-colony: its inheritance of the colonial, implicitly violent way of organizing politics and society and its more or less chaotic character with excesses of oppression and violence. Both elements are not straightforwardly visible in MacGarry's *Race of Man* but in Mohau Modisakeng's *Ke Kgomo ya moshate* the protagonists are struggling with power and greed as will be addressed in the second chapter. Part of the colonial inheritance Mbembe discusses is the animalisation of the colonised. In Alexander's *Butcher Boys*, still made in the late colonial period of apartheid, one could speak of animalisation, as we will see in Chapter three, but the three characters in the sculpture are white and it is not clear if they represent the colonised, the colonisers or an overall sentiment of violence or depravity.

Chapter 2. Violence in 'whiteness' and 'blackness'

According to Bronwyn Law-Viljoen in an essay written in 2010 about the representation of violence in South African photography, the history of photography in South Africa can be interpreted as a history of violence[46]. She says that "almost every South African photographer who came of age prior to 1994 was, by default, engaged in an intimate struggle with violence – the violence of simply *looking*, (italics by Law-Viljoen) and the violence to be *looked at* in South African society[47]." She argues that photography in South Africa before 1994 was generally documentary photography and as such had to do with violence, even if the photographic subjects were not about personal violence. "Even the quiet image of a man mowing his lawn (….), in the context of a country heading towards implosion[48]," was in fact a photo about a violent condition. Referring to Johan Galtung, one could also say that a picture of a lawn mowing man is, in that context, an image of structural violence, without even showing the abject aspect of violence. As the structural and physical violence of apartheid permeated all capillaries of society, such that it determined every aspect of common daily life, from the communal to the individual and from the physical to the mental, something comparable to an extent, I think, happened in the visual arts[49]. When the violence of apartheid ended, photographers had to change their subject, because of reasons concerning photography itself, but also and particularly because daily life conditions changed. Apartheid and the liberation struggle were part of the iconography of South African photography. Also many South African artists were engaged in the struggle against apartheid which in many cases became part of their work. Volume three of *Visual Century* covers the period from 1973 to 1992 and discusses in eight essays by different authors an enormous diversity of various artists and how they reacted to apartheid. In a more modest form Sue Williamson does the same in her *Resistance Art in South Africa* of 1989 in which she also explicitly discusses Jane Alexander's *Butcher Boys*[50]. Unlike photography the arts had no single iconography in the apartheid era but nevertheless, when apartheid ended other subjects gained significance, which had consequences for the personal iconography of the artists.

However, South Africa, as a post-colony did not escape re-established violence, the violence as Achille Mbembe describes it within the reconstitution to a post-colonial society: "The postcolony is characterized by a distinctive style of political improvisation, by a tendency to excess and lack of proportion, as well as by distinctive ways identities are multiplied, transformed, and put into circulation. But the postcolony is also made up of a series of corporate institutions and a political machinery that, once in place, constitute a distinctive regime of violence. In this sense, the postcolony is a particularly

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[46] Law-Viljoen 2010, p. 214: "One of a number of possible histories of photography in Africa in general and in South Africa in particular is a history of violence,".

[47] Law-Viljoen 2010, p.215.

[48] Law-Viljoen 2010, p. 220.

[49] Williamson 1989, p. 42. As Williamson says it so eloquently: "The horrific thing about being a part of a sick society is that there is no escape from the disease. Everyone is affected."

[50] Williamson 1989, p. 42-45.

revealing, and rather dramatic, stage on which are played out the wider problems of subjection and its corollary, discipline[51].” South Africa of course is a special case in that it is still home to an influential part of its former colonisers and in that it has installed a parliamentary, multi-party democracy at its post-colonial start with a progressive constitution. These elements may be special but they are also part of the post-colonial condition of South Africa. At the same time the foundational violence of present day South Africa still has its traumas, which, for the time being seem to be renewed in every turn of history[52].

In what respect does Michael MacGarry’s *Race of Man* represent violent aspects of the post-colonial in South Africa and what role does ‘whiteness’ play in it? MacGarry makes objects, photographs, videos and installations. Generally in many of his works the power of imperialism is shown, amongst others, in the shape of modern machinery like motorbikes and weapons[53] (fig. 8). He has partially covered some of his objects with nails, sometimes enlarged, and pieces of metal, seemingly rusty, like in power figures or nkishi from Central Africa (fig. 9). Nkishi are wooden figures, which are used to harness the power of the dead or ancestral spirits, and into which nails and pieces of metal are hammered to make a deal with the spirits to avoid evil. Each piece of metal is such a deal or a vow with the dead. In that way MacGarry not just restricts himself culturally to South Africa, but he implicates features of other African cultures in his work too, and as such appropriating as a white African part of the black African cultural heritage. More directly attached to the subject are MacGarry’s rifles and artillery covered with nails and pieces of metal, like *Private Grammar I* (fig. 10) and *Level 9* (fig. 11), both made in 2011 or *Howitzer Fetish* (fig. 12) of 2010. The wheelings and dealings of international legal and illegal weapon traders are well known and Africa has more than its fair share of it[54]. Of course there is always a good reason to harness the power of a weapon. The idea of a fetish (MacGarry uses the word in some of his titles) also implicates that there is something which is not visible, but which is replaced by something else which *is* visible. In the case of *Private Grammar I*, *Level 9* and *Howitzer Fetish* it may be obvious that the weapons stand for lethal power and violence but also for the commodification of lethal weapons and violence. These works are also presented as fetishes in two ways: they are presented as art objects, which gives them another meaning and makes them aesthetic objects of value, and of course, they have nails which make them objects of

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[51] Mbembe 2001, pp. 102-103.

[52] It can be seen in the reoccurring of violence in already before mentioned cases like the students’ protests and the initial reactions of the authorities, the violence against foreigners and the incapability to protect them, the Marikana killings, but also in the numerous allegations of corruption against for instance former president Zuma, who until so far has escaped justice, just like the political leaders of apartheid did.

[53] In some of his video works, notably *Flies* (2014) and *Excuse me, while I disappear* (2015), modernist and postmodern architecture also play a role.

[54] Apart from the fact that the defences of many African countries are regularly supplied with weapons, like in any other country in the world, local militias, like Al Shabab in Somalia, Boko Haram in Nigeria or different militias in the Democratic Republic of the Congo also acquire weapons. South Africa has a heritage from the apartheid era of different defence and security companies.

communication with the spiritual world. In a recorded interview in 2015[55] MacGarry stresses his interest in, amongst others, fetishisation in present day African politics. He acknowledges that for instance the AK47, including its bullets, is an imported product in Africa, but at the same time it is fetishised and has become part of the spiritual world that is, according to MacGarry, "parallel to a real world in a lot of political systems." In the interview he stresses the link between animism, African politics, colonial history and Africa as a "dumping ground" even for "ideology like Marxism."

Further on, taking a closer look at *Private Grammar I* and *Level 9* even the unpractised eye will see that the weapons look like toys instead of real rifles. Their colours are strange and their construction does not seem to have any traditional logic. In fact they are made from props of the 2009 science-fiction movie *District 9*[56], directed by the South African Neill Blomkamp[57]. The film, shot in Soweto, has a distinct South African flavour, District 9 being a refugee camp where neglected and malnourished aliens from outer space are kept in Johannesburg until the point, after some decades, that the authorities start to relocate them to another area. The name 'District 9' may remind one of 'District Six', a once multi-racial quarter of Cape Town, which was cleared in the 1970s to be reserved for whites only[58]. It was finally demolished in 1982, the year that in the story of *District 9* the aliens arrived in Johannesburg to be evicted from their camp the year after the film was produced. The man in charge of the operation is an Afrikaner petit-bourgeois bureaucrat of the commercial firm exploiting the camp. Subsequently the whole operation gets rigorously and violently out of hand and ends in a bloodbath in which the man in charge becomes a scapegoat for all parties. *District 9* deals with racial prejudice and apartheid in an extremely violent and bloody science-fiction atmosphere. In that way the meaning of *Private Grammar I* and *Level 9* shifts, in fact their meaning becomes ambivalent. The fetishes covered with nails are fabrications from a science-fiction movie. If they refer to violence, they refer to fictional violence, but fictional violence in *District 9* is based on the former realities of racial segregation in South Africa. As far as these works refer to a reality they do so with a detour.

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[55] The videoed interview was made for the 2015 exhibition *Making Africa: A Continent of Contemporary Design* in Guggenheim, Bilbao, and can be seen on MacGarry's website http://www.alltheorynopractice.com/info.html (last retrieved 13 August 2018).

[56] On his website MacGarry describes *Private Grammar I* and *Level 9* as "Certified original film prop from feature film: *District 9* (2009)." See: http://www.alltheorynopractice.com/privategrammar.html (last retrieved 11 August 2018) and http://www.alltheorynopractice.com/level9.html (last retrieved 11 August 2018).

[57] Blomkamp (Johannesburg, 1979) is a film director, of mostly science fiction movies of which *District 9* is the best known and most successful. For a complete filmography see: https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0088955/ (last retrieved 20 May 2018). For details of Distrct 9, see: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1136608/?ref_=nm_flmg_dr_15
(last retrieved 20 May 2018).

[58] Coombes 2004, pp. 116-148. Coombes, in her interesting and revealing study of public memory in the visual arts in South Africa, tells in a chapter the story of District Six and the subsequent moves in the post-apartheid era to make it, once a place of violence, a place of memory. The present District Six museum tries, apart from preserving the memory of the place and its meaning in the story of apartheid, to play a role in the present social development of the place.

In *Race of Man* lethal violence is a completely white, male affair and it is also a very physical matter, almost a matter of camaraderie. The two main characters seem to befriend each other as if trying to deny the fatal rules of the game. They co-operate in eliminating the third man in the game. In the end it is clear the scene has taken place in a studio where. During that last shot one can hear one of the actors whistling the main theme from The Good, the Bad and the Ugly (Sergio Leone, 1966, music by Ennio Morricone), a humorous, but somewhat cynical comment on consumer heroism in gaming. In the beginning of the film MacGarry tells that the two men are characters who are trying to survive in a computer game. To win one must "consume" the other. As weapons, different tools are featured in the film, amongst them the weapon used as prop for *Level 9*; one of the players is keeping it in his hand seemingly not exactly sure about what to do with it. The weapon links the video again to Blomkamp's *District 9* and as such to South Africa and the policies of segregation and racism. It is also not accidental MacGarry called the fetishised weapon with nails *Level 9* as the game starts again with 'level 9' which means one of the players in the film already succeeded in winning eight levels in the game. Also MacGarry suggests on his web site to present the video together with *Private Grammar I*; in fact both *Level 9* and *Private Grammar I*, amongst others, were part of his solo show *Entertainment* at Stevenson Gallery, Johannesburg in 2011[59].

Race of Man is a scene in a politically decolonised world, but it is also taking place in the aftermath of it in which white men have trivialised violence as a form of leisure. In *Race of Man* personal violence is involved between the three men, but the roles of influencer and influencee are very much blurred, due to the fact that the influencing – the violent action – is directed by the game itself. The game can be interpreted as structural violence. It is presented as a voice.

If *Race of Man* is linked to a certain period I would like to link it to the post 9/11 period. In his article 'The trauma of conceptualism for South African art,' James Alexander Sey concludes for the position of contemporary South African art on the world stage: "Just as the concept-object in avant-garde art was supplanted by the convergence of the symbolic and the real in the discourse of terror, so local and regional views of otherness as a motive force in culture and art have been supplanted by the Other of terror[60]." The "Other" was obviously central in South African colonial thinking. The idea of terror also played a role in it. There was state terror, and the terror of rebellion. White suprematism was tried to be countered with Black Consciousness and even with black suprematism. According to Sey South Africa has "a special relationship to the process of othering[61]." I would say this has especially led in South Africa to art works that try to deal with identity, which fit in well with postmodern and post-postmodern tendencies in Western Europe, North America as well as the post-colonial world. One could think of photographer Zanele Muholi[62] (1972) and her pictures about black lesbianism, or of

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[59] See web site of Stevenson gallery: http://archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/macgarry/index2011.html (last retrieved 20 May 2018)

[60] Sey 2010, p. 454.

[61] Sey 2010, p. 454.

[62] Zanele Muholi claims her photographs are part of her activism. She recently had a solo exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (8 July – 22 October 2017).

artist Nicholas Hlobo[63] (1975) and his identity as a gay person and a Xhosa, but also of the already mentioned Kendell Geers and his position as an Afrikaner man.

However it is difficult not think of the theatricality of terrorism when watching *Race of Man*. The use of theatricality in terrorism has become obvious, especially with the spread of social media, and the scenes are usually extremely violent and work strong on our feelings of abjection[64]. In *Race of Man* two men terrorise each other for no other reason than to follow the rules of the game they are playing and to get to 'level 9.' However "for no other reason than to follow the rules of the game" could also be said about any terrorist act, which always has a logic of sorts, and which brings people – terrorists, victims, bystanders, viewers on television and social media – in an illogical state of abjection or revulsion in which all actors feel they have either to live by the rules or to break them, but the latter is potentially dangerous. In *Race of Man* breaking the rules is even regarded as a weakness. The two men are white men, which in itself is a statement, especially so because the work is made by a South African in South Africa. And further on of course: there are no women in the work. To the men the "Other" is the competitor, the other white man. In the beginning they try to understand the pointlessness of killing each other, which is reinforced when they see a third man and kill him. At that moment, the third man is the "Other" who poses a danger to their lives and a possible threat to their bond. But later on the logic of the game makes it clear that, in spite of all camaraderie, one of them must be killed. They both 'other' each other, again for no other reason than for the rules of the game and to get to the next level. It is significant that on one hand MacGarry leaves out the 'othering' on racial terms which played such an important role in colonialism and which still haunts the post-colonial world, while on the other hand his protagonists are white males.

MacGarry has not explained himself about it, nor has he talked much in interviews about his own position as a white South African. In his work he is clearly a South African who is generally concerned with the continent he is born in and living in, with its power policies and the impact of colonialism it still endures. As such the whiteness of the men in *Race of Man* could also be seen as a statement in the present. Esther Schreuder writes about MacGarry's work: "There is a never ending

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[63] Nicholas Hlobo makes amongst others sculptures with textile and leather and also does performances, sometimes also making use of textiles in them. He had a solo exhibition in Museum Beelden aan Zee, The Hague (12 February – 15 May 2016). Nomusa Makhubu published an interesting essay about Muholi and Hlobo and the violence in sexuality in their works against the background of a both conservative and liberal South Africa and gender relations. (Makhubu, N.M., 'Violence and the cultural logics of pain: representations of sexuality in the work of Nicholas Hlobo and Zanele Muholi', *Critical Arts*, 26:4, 2012, pp. 504-524).

[64] The 9/11 attacks of 2001, were clearly directed as a theatrical spectacle for which no artist was responsible and which was seen by people everywhere in the world. Since then visual representations of terrorism as theatrical acts have become almost household. German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen (1928-2007) famously called 9/11 attacks at the time "the biggest work of art there has ever been." Many found his remark tasteless, but basically he was right in that the event had beaten many a monumental work of art in its visual impact and the instant mythologising of it. The idea of Sey's essay is that modernism had an impact because of shock, that sense of shock has been taken over by terrorism, so artists have to find different ways. I think however that South Africa, and many other post-colonies have had their portion of shock through terrorism by colonialism and even by post-colonialism.

circle of violence in which men, in his eyes always white, appear to be imprisoned. He also lifts the taboo on the pleasure that is experienced from violence[65]." They could be regarded as metaphoric for imperialism and modernism that went hand in hand and from which grew postmodernism[66] and present day imperialism, already represented by the video game itself and the ordinariness with which it is implemented represented by the ordinariness of the two white men.

How does *Race of Man*'s violence of 'whiteness' relate to Mohau Modisakeng's violence of 'blackness' as it appears in *Ke kgomo ya moshate*? There is no camaraderie like in *Race of Man*; there is rather more a formal cordiality during the first part of the performance. There is a stiff formality in the greeting ceremony. The grinding of the machetes seems to have a double meaning: a confirmation of peace but also a confirmation of strength. The polite table manners of the two men, serving each other drinks and toasting while their machetes are ceremonially laid down on the table, seem to give the same double message. Where *Race of Man* ends quite bloody, with the dead actor in the arms of the whistling survivor but with the assertion that game can start all over again, *Ke Kgomo ya moshate* ends unresolved with all formality vanished from the scene, the two men leaving it with a toppled chair, a lot of charcoal and dust on the table and on the floor and with the two machetes stabbed in the tabletop.

In the announcement of the performance at the Amsterdam gallery a commentary is given on its content[67]. According to this anonymous introduction Modisakeng's Ke Kgomo ya moshate reflects on "the legacy of colonialism and its effects on post independence African society." "In South Africa, the legacy of the political corruption of the Apartheid system continued to hinder the processes of addressing historical imbalances. The issue of economic inequality was further exacerbated by worsening poverty and growing unemployment," the introduction says. It tells how in newly independent African states new rulers took over the power structures of the former colonisers, more or less in accordance with Achille Mbewmbe's ideas about the post-colony. To many Africans things remained more or less the same, apart from the fact that new elites evolved. In short, it has led to the present state of anxiety, instability and rampant disparity. It would be easy to regard *Ke Kgomo ya moshate* as an illustration of what happens when new African leaders are confronted with the question of power and wealth and how to maintain it and increase it, but why would a black South African artist point to that and why would he do that in this way? Moreover, are these two men with machetes new African leaders, or two figures in an allegory? The whole scene is kept in black and white, so the performance is not just about corruption of newly gained power, it is *visually* in the first place about

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[65] Schreuder 2012, p. 40.

[66] Groys 2016, p. 38. Apart from the differences between modernism and postmodernism, Groys also sees a similarity in the lack of content in its forms, shapes and signs: "Thus, even if Western postmodernism in its different forms was a reaction against late modernist formalism, it inherited a formalist attitude toward signs and images. All artistic forms were understood as zero-forms, devoid of any specific content and meaning." As such one can argue that postmodernism is as much related to imperialism as modernism was.

[67] The introductory text to *Ke Kgomo ya moshate* on Ron Mandos gallery's web site: http://www.ronmandos.nl/news/endabeni-mohau-modisakeng (last retrieved 20 May 2018).

black and white. In that case it could be about being black in the post-colonial situation. In that situation different aspects are brought together: indeed power, greed, violence, but also servitude (in the person of the waiter) and especially aesthetics in the way the whole action is carefully choreographed, the way the actors are clad, the way in which the violence develops and especially in the use of charcoal and its black dust. Aesthetics is a prominent part of the performance and it plays a substantive and expressive role. Like in *Race of Man* the two actors are both influencer and influencee but it seems the aesthetics of the piece prevents it from invoking abjection in spite of the obvious violence.

There are some striking resemblances between *Race of Man* and *Ke Kgomo ya moshate*. First: both works are strongly and carefully directed. MacGarry with his lighting takes care of the clarity of both actors, for instance in the use of cast shadows in the desert scenes (fig. 13) and the lack of shadows in the studio scenes (fig. 3). Modisakeng in his direction and choreography takes care of the formalisation of actions and the ambiguous use of black and white. To get to the core of violence the work needs a carefully managed and thought through technique, even crudeness is carefully staged. Second: in MacGarry's video whiteness plays a role as in Modisakeng's performance blackness plays a role. If one looks superficially, *Race of Man* could be about white imperialism and consumerism and *Ke Kgomo ya moshate* could be about the predicament of black power in post-colonial states. Whiteness and blackness still play an important role, which seems idiosyncratic but without social connotations like privilege, supremacy or institutional racism. Third: in both works weapons are used either practically or symbolically, by two opponents, who are of the same calibre. Fourth: in both works there is a third party who more or less dictates what happens. In MacGarry's video it is the voice who dictates the game and as such the activities of the two protagonists, and in Modisakeng's performance there is the waiter, and in fact the author of the work, who dumps the loads of charcoal in between the two actors and so influences their actions. There is the idea of a predicament, a situation in which violence seems to be the only solution. Fifth: both works have titles that can be explained in different ways. "Race of Man" refers in the first place to a video game or even a game in general, but who is "Man?" Man in general or the male? And could "Race" also be interpreted as skin colour? The title "Ke Kgomo ya moshate" is based on a Setswana proverb: "ke kgomo ya moshate, wa e gapa o molato, wa e lesa o molato," which should be interpreted as "the thing can't be solved without stepping on someone's feet," according to an introduction of Modisakeng's show at Kunstraum Innsbruck[68]. Looking at the literal translation of the Tswana words, it may mean something like 'If you bring a cow to town, either keeping it or letting it go will cause offence[69]'. In both interpretations of Modisakeng's

[68] "The exhibition's title, 'Ke Kgomo Ya Moshate,' is borrowed from a proverb used in the artist's mother tongue Setswana, that in its entirety goes: 'ke kgomo ya moshate, wa e gapa o molato, wa e lesa o molato,' and could be translated as follows: the thing can't be solved without stepping on someone's feet (or, it is an insoluble situation)." Part of an anonymous introductory text on the Art Connect web site for Modisakeng's exhibition at Kunstraum Innsbruck, Austria (5 September – 24 October 2015) : http://www.artconnect.com/events/ke-kgomo-ya-moshate (last retrieved 20 May 2018).

[69] Admittedly this is a highly unprofessional interpretation. The artist himself did not reply to my question about the meaning and my own command of Setswana is non-existent. Literally translating

title there is the strong idea of a predicament caused by a new situation, but what is exactly "the thing" that should "be solved?" Titles in both works not just explain the work but also give an extra dimension to them. Sixth: both works are about men; there is not anything in the works that refers to or reminds of women or femininity. Violence is very much a male business, or, more generally formulated, gender plays a role in violence. Seventh: there is no difference between influencers and influencees, while the most powerful and structural influencer – the voice in *Race of Man* and the waiter in *Ke Kgomo ya moshate* – has a seemingly minor role in both works. In *Race of Man*, of course, one protagonist is killed by the other, but that could have been vice versa. An eighth and last resemblance is the fact that neither of the works refers to an historic situation or action that should be remembered in a monumental way with moral implications, or to the historic tensions between white and black, or social injustice. There is no 'monumentality of morals' in the violence in MacGarry's and Modisakeng's works. There are of course differences too. For example: there is, as said before, the difference between the camaraderie between the actors in *Race of Man* and the ceremonial cordiality between the protagonists in *Ke Kgomo ya moshate*, there is the bloodiness and 'realness' in the video as opposed to the allegorical soiling with black dust in the performance and there is, as it seems, the violent 'reinforcement' of blackness with the charcoal in Modisakeng's work while there is no substance or anything symbolic that reinforces the whiteness in MacGarry's work; also in *Race of Man* weapons are definitely used to kill while in *Ke Kgomo ya moshate* the weapons very much have a particular symbolic function: the actors are wielding their machetes but do not kill with it. In spite of these clear dofferences, however, I think that the aforementioned eight resemblances, I think the works also constitute a way in which violence may be represented by a post-colonial generation.

In his recent essay 'Mohau Modisakeng: Vapour' Ashraf Jamal tries to get deeper into Modisakeng's work, amongst others by mixing Frantz Fanon's ideas in his discourse[70]. He quotes one of Fanon's most obscure phrases of his 1961 book *The Wretched of the Earth* (translated in English in 1963): "Let there be no mistake about it; it is to this zone of occult instability where the people dwell that we must come; and it is there that our souls are crystallised and that our perceptions and our lives are transfused with light[71]." Fanon's statement leans toward transcendence, and I think Fanon, at the time of writing, knew very well that far more than just rational logic was needed for black people to decolonise the idea of colonial blackness, not just politically, culturally and socially but also in the minds of black people themselves. Jamal quotes and discusses Fanon when writing about Modisakeng's *Metamorphosis* photo series (fig. 14) of 2015, which does not apparently have something to do with violence. Generally, Modisakeng's works seem to be reflective, but he has said in more interviews and statements that violence, among other factors, does play a role in his works[72].

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via the internet the pattern would be: ke=I, kgomo=cow, ya=go/my, moshate=town, wa=his/her/their, e=it/these/this/is, gapa=confiscate/attract/usurp, o=is/this/it, molato=offence, lesa=let go.

[70] Jamal 2017, pp. 188-192.

[71] Jamal 2017, p. 189. Fanon 1963, p. 227.

[72] For instance: "My work is concerned with some of the tensions that arise out of that history and the memory of the violence imposed on black bodies in the span of Western rule on the continent."

One might think of the violence of colonialism and subsequent decolonisation, like in South Africa itself, but, following Jamal's essay, one could also think, inspired by Fanon, of violence not just as a "reactive act of aggression" but also as a what he calls "transmogrifying and cleansing event" that has to be experienced to reach decolonisation[73]. Although Jamal is still writing here about Modisakeng's photography, this element is all the more clear in *Ke Kgomo ya moshate*. It also explains the lack of bloodiness of the violence compared to the violence in *Race of Man,* and the formalised choreography of the work. In spite of the menacing machetes no drop of blood is shed, neither in real, nor metaphorically. It also brings blackness into another perspective. While different aspects of the performance may have to do with the post-colonial condition, the men wearing white shirts and black trousers as a heritage of white colonialism, but as the trousers are black, the white of the shirts have no real meaning anymore. Also the shirts become tainted with the coal. The waiter or servant is indeed black as are the two other actors, but his role is not just a submissive one, he also rules the situation. Of course also the charcoal is black as is its dust. As such the performance is indeed about blackness but it also transcends it, without glorifying or despising it. The violence is in the blackness and about the blackness, it is part of it, but not the cause of it. Violence seems to be part of the blackness to liberate it

Race of Man in a way also tries to re-establish skin colour from another perspective, without the pathetic sentimentality of the white man's guilt and again without glorification or scorn. However, the two main figures in *Race of Man* are far less elusive abstractions than the actors in *Ke Kgomo ya moshate*. They are characters of flesh and blood. Also the protagonists in *Race of Man* seem to be transfixed in their actions, the banal ordinariness has taken over from ritual, time has not become a tool for transcendence but a place for infinite leisure. On the contrary *Ke Kgomo ya moshate* looks ceremonial, almost ritualistic, as if the men *have* to pass through what is happening and what they are doing. MacGarry's white men have lost their urgency while Modisakeng's black men may refind it against the odds.

In *Ke Kgomo ya moshate* Modisakeng himself apparently plays a side role, which is in fact a key role. Modisakeng's is a decomposing role in his performance. One might say Modisakeng plays the role of Fate, or of a Greek god who provokes mortals to act and often to their own detriment. As such he puts himself in the place of an influencer to the violence that his acts incite. Generally, of course, one could say that if a work of art visualises violence, the artist is the influencer in the first place. In a performance however, not just conceived and directed by the artist but in which he also takes an important visual role as a waiter, this fact is all the more stressed. Apart from the content of the performance, it also says something about the role of the artist in conceiving, making and presenting his work of art, and particularly in *Ke Kgomo ya moshate* about the representation of

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Modisakeng in an interview with Houghton Kinsman, (Kinsman, H., 'Next Chapter: Mohau Modisakeng on investigating the impact of cultural histories on contemporary society', web magazine *Another Africa*, 15 September 2014, http://www.anotherafrica.net/art-culture/next-chapter-mohau-modisakeng-on-investigating-the-impact-of-cultural-histories-on-contemporary-society - last retrieved 20 May 2018).

[73] Jamal 2017, p. 189.

violence. A sense of being oppressed on the base of colour seems to have been defeated, and a sense of ‘blackness’ is being tried to be reconstituted with the artist himself actively taking part in decomposition and recomposition. As such Modisakeng’s *Ke Kgomo ya moshate* is a post-colonial work in many aspects.

Both *Race of Man* and *Ke Kgomo ya moshate* are works about the post-colonial situation in that they both deal with skin colour and its implications out of and after the colonial context. In *Race of Man* life of the white men has become a game of life or death that repeats itself. There is no sign in the work that the violence in it, whether personal in that there is killing in it, or structural in that the rules of the game are violent, is judged wrong. It just seems to be unavoidably there. One might say in *Race of Man* post-colonial violence of white men has turned against themselves and they are accepting it, knowing the rules of the game. Although there are similarities between *Race of Man* and *Ke Kgomo ya moshate* the differences are significant. The question of ‘blackness’ in Modisakeng’s performance is a very different one than the question of ‘whiteness’ in MacGarry’s video, especially in the way personal violence is expressed. In *Race of Man* the violence is in the end bloody and the actors play characters of flesh and blood, while in *Ke Kgomo wa moshate* the personal violence is formal and almost ritualised and the actors play metaphoric figures without an individual character. Despite these differences both works show violence as unavoidable, in MacGarry’s video, literally as part of the game, but in both works as part of a process of finding and re-establishing oneself in a post-colonial society. The inevitability of violence is represented by a commanding voice in MacGarry’s work and the artist himself in Modisakeng’s.

Chapter 3. From morality to post-colonial aesthetics

With her intriguing sculpture *Butcher Boys* (1985-86) and the developments in her works afterwards, Jane Alexander[74] is probably one of the most prominent artists who was born in and has lived and worked during and after the apartheid period. *Butcher Boys* was made in the last part of the apartheid era, a time that saw an extreme excess of personal violence reinforced by relentlessness and ever present structural violence. *Butcher Boys* is mentioned in most literature about modern South African art where Alexander's work is discussed[75]. Its image has gained some fame in South Africa as it is exhibited quite prominently in the National Gallery of Arts in Cape Town as a monument of the late apartheid era. A pastiche of it was used for the cover of Brett Bailey's book *The Plays of Miracle and Wonder* (2003) containing three plays that deal with personal violence (fig.15), and a controversy arose when hip hop group Die Antwoord used images that looked like *Butcher Boys* in a music video clip for their album *Ten$ion*[76] (2012). Especially in online papers and news blogs this controversy caused quite some discussion about *Butcher Boys*' value as a monument to an era or as a monument that still has its value. Like in Michael MacGarry's *Race of Man* there are three protagonists – though in *Race of Man* one of them serves as the third man who is killed by the other two – and they are all white. At first sight there the correlation seems to end, but could bring a comparison between the two even more clarity to the representation of violence in *Race of Man*? More specifically could it give more insight in its post-colonial content as compared to Alexander's work from the colonial apartheid era?

Race of Man obviously is both technically and in time a long way from Alexander's *Butcher Boys*, although both clearly deal with violence. In *Race of Man* the digital revolution has taken place, and a looping narrative like in this work, should it have been conceived by a South African by the time of Alexander's *Butcher Boys*, would have been a very awkward artistic twist against the background of the actual violence of the apartheid era. Although in both works the protagonists are white, *Race of*

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[74] Jane Alexander was born in Johannesburg. She studied at Witwatersrand University. Today she lives and works in Cape Town and she is a lecturer at Michaelis School of Fine Art at the University of Cape Town. Her work was shown internationally amongst others at the biennales of Havana, Dakar and Venice. In the Netherlands her work was on show in the group exhibition 'The Rainbow Nation' in 2012 at Museum Beelden aan Zee in The Hague.

[75] Amongst others: Williamson 1989, pp. 42-43; Williamson, Jamal 1996, pp 21,22; 25. Duiker 2004, p. 23; Pissarra 2011, p. 3; Richards 2011, pp 63-67; Reinewald 2012, p. 29; Neluheni 2012, p. 46; Jamal 2017, p. 292; Gibling, Spring 2016, p. 217. Most authors stress the expressive qualities of the work, especially the evil of apartheid.

[76] Reinewald 2012, pp. 29-30. Reinewald focuses on the use of the iconography of *Butcher Boys* in South African pop music. "In March [2012 – BP] *Butcher Boys* led to an 'artistic riot'. Jane Alexander felt that the integrity of her creation was encroached upon because of its 'improper use' in a music clip by the South African gangsta-rap duo Die Antwoord. In terms of copyright law she was entirely correct. But nonetheless, this gives precisely the impression of the interweaving of one another's history.""(....) Alexander's reserve is understandable. Perhaps what creates the most concern is that it remains unclear as to the extent to which the quasi-tribal, 'white trash' attitude of Die Antwoord is posed or serious." For a short report on the controversy see a short article in the Mail & Guardian of 14 February 2012: https://mg.co.za/article/2012-02-14-die-antwoord-trailer-pulled-after-copyright-concerns (last retrieved 18 May 2018).

Man is explicitly about violence and whiteness and its actors are characters of flesh and blood, while the *Butcher Boys*, although life sized and almost 'real', are at best materialised chimeras.

Another aspect I discussed in Chapter one is animalisation in colonialism as described by Achille Mbembe, and I concluded that the specific animalisation of *Butcher Boys* had no obvious connection to the animalisation of colonised people as Mbembe describes it. Animalisation as a form of degradation is however not just significant in colonialism. One only has to think about commonly and daily used insults like 'dog', 'cow' or 'pig'. Degradation will not always lead to referring to human beings as animals or beasts but it will at least lead to a creature regarded to be 'less than human', even 'less than humane'. Again, this will lead to a treatment with either the greatest possible disdain towards the degraded other, or to a kind of parental compassion, as Mbembe described the treatment of the colonised.

Degradation is clearly involved in *Butcher Boys*. The characters have fallen to a level lower than human or humane, they seem to have turned partly into animals, are almost naked and are ugly. Colin Richards even calls the *Butcher Boys* and Alexander's subsequent works (she made *Butcher Boys* when she was still an art student) an "exploration of the human animal[77]." This does not happen in *Race of Man*, although one might argue that the behaviour of the actors is degrading. That, however would be too easy an interpretation as the actors do not behave degradingly toward each other.

It seems *Butcher Boys* has been made to have a maximum impact on the viewer, but that goes for many works of art. It seems however that the degrading image of *Butcher Boys* was made to evoke feelings ranging from discomfort to horror. The three figures in Alexander's sculpture are life sized and look 'real', which increases their impact on the viewer. Apart from their pale, almost palled complexion, the horror is increased by a dark scar running from the throat down to the belly in each of them. When walking around them, one can see that they also have vertical scars, or rather gaps where the backbones can be seen (fig. 16). Many people, including myself, will find *Butcher Boys* unsettling, may be even threatening, when seeing it for the first time. There is certainly an idea of imminent violence around the sculpture, but can that violence be deduced from its visible features? The boys are sinewy, there are three of them and they are horned. Their beastlike skulls may contain very small brains, so it might be difficult to reason with them and, moreover, they have holes instead of ears, so they might not even hear in case one would like to talk reason to them. The most disturbing feature is that they look so 'real'. Especially in a public building like an art gallery they look like strange and disturbing visitors amongst other visitors and, for sure, one would not like to meet them on one's own in a desolate place in town. This directness is another contrast with *Race of Man*. Of course there is also a kind of 'realness' in *Race of Man*, but one can only see it on a screen. One can see what happens, maybe become horrified by it, but it does not have the presence of a sculpture. Obviously *Race of Man* wants to speak to the viewer and wants to have a maximum impact, just like *Butcher Boys,* but the viewer cannot feel the nearness of the actors or of what is happening. That is of course different in a performance like *Ke Kgomo ya moshate* in which the audience is present at what is happening. Even there however the impact of the work is a staged one, a kind of theatre.

[77] Richards 2011, p. 63.

Still, in spite of its felt presence, is there any feature in *Butcher Boys* that would point to imminent violence or that one or all of the figures are getting ready to wreak havoc? Not really. They do not look like charging creatures at all. Their horns may look impressive, but they are quite useless as weapons. Their faces may resemble baboon's faces but do not even have a mouth. Their bodies are completely human, though that feature does not seem to be decisively more comforting or disturbing. The fact that they probably have little brains should not be very disturbing either, as many creatures around us have small brains indeed and we are not threatened by them. They have no genitals, and so they represent no sexual danger either. So the features and details of the boys are in themselves not threatening, but they are not comforting either. The title 'Butcher Boys' also redirects the viewer to the nakedness of the three boys themselves and to the vertical cuts in their torsos. Did somebody try to butcher *them*? Are they themselves potential victims of some cruel aggression? Has an aggressive kind of rot or gangrene entered their bodies? Looking at them in that way the interpretation may change: they look particularly vulnerable in their nudity amongst the usually well clad visitors of the gallery, they don't show any threatening behaviour. After all, the fact that they look repulsive, does not mean they are dangerous. One may even empathise with them for looking so ugly, which may remind one of the version of animalisation discussed by Mbembe in which the "other" is a creature to be looked after like a pet. In spite of a meticulous analysis it is impossible to interpret *Butcher Boys* in just one way. Whichever way one wants to interpret them, the vulnerability of the naked and scarred bodies of the boys, their frightening and grotesque heads, their eerie paleness in combination with their relaxed poses make for an interpretation in which aggression plays a role. It is however not at all clear whether they are influencers or influencees.

Viewers have experienced this duality or even multiplicity in *Butcher Boys*, amongst them Tenley Bick in her article 'Horror Histories: Apartheid and the Abject Body in the Work of Jane Alexander'[78]. Bick tries to interpret the *Butcher Boys* from the point of view of the viewer and concludes that the viewer may possibly see him/herself in them. She does so by pointing out that we as viewers are not shocked by the inhumanity of the *Butcher Boys* but by their humanity[79]. To an extent that is true. The 'realness' clearly has to do with their naturalistic human bodies. Even their postures are as casual as one would expect from a sitting person and are anatomically well captured. But their skin colour, their wounds and their deformed and horned heads seem to be a completely different story. These are not as what we would recognise as human, though it should be admitted that they are neither inhuman. One might conclude that they are hybrid as they have different animal-like features but in the end they look like humans in the first place. Their abnormalities are interpreted by Bick as manifestations of the disfigured South African social body by the time the work was made by

[78] Bick 2010, p. 30. "(....) although the significance of Alexander's practice seems to be the horror and repulsion that she causes us to experience, the challenge that she poses to us as viewers is to deconstruct this sensation – that is, to consider why we feel this way in the presence of the figures that the artist produces."

[79] Bick 2001, p. 33. "Instead, perhaps we should recognize that the humanity of Alexander's figures is at the crux of her work's critical efficacy. Indeed, in spite of their bestial horns, frequently disfigured faces, and castrated genitalia, these figures do not horrify us because they are inhuman; rather, they are horrifying because they are fundamentally human."

Alexander[80]. Alexander herself, in her reaction to the use of *Butcher Boys*-like images by Die Antwoord, described her sculpture as referring "to the dehumanising forces of apartheid[81]." In full respect for Alexander's own intentions, this interpretation seems to me a rather fixed one, for what are *Butcher Boys* telling us *now*, more than three decades after the time the sculptural group was made by Alexander? Surely, they were inspired by the horrors of apartheid, but their impact can still be felt very well and that makes them more than a monument to "the dehumanising forces of apartheid. During the apartheid era, following Bick, it must have been clear to any audience in South Africa what *Butcher Boys* meant and what it manifested. Following my own analysis, I would say the *Butcher Boys*' dualism still contains this brooding violence, or better formulated: the feeling of fear of violence and the horror of that fear. 'Horror' is exactly the word Bick uses in her title, but it might also be called violence towards the viewer. This is what Merriam Websters' dictionary calls "a clashing or jarring quality." Alexander forces the viewer to look at the horror of these distorted figures. She is not as rough as to use the agency of personal violence in *Butcher Boys*; there are for instance no horrifying bloody fresh wounds or amputations in the work, neither do the *Boys* look particularly menacing, nor are they wielding a weapon. It is not the behaviour of the *Butcher Boys* that may remind us of violence, it is just how they look like.

In the case of *Butcher Boys* it is not just the reminiscence of violence it is also abjection. One could think of Julia Kristeva's descriptions in the first chapter of her well known essay *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*[82]. Already in its very first sentence she writes about "one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable" when trying to give an idea of the sensation of abjection[83]. Bick, in her article, which seems already in its title to be influenced by Kristeva's essay, also points to the abject in the *Butcher Boys*. After quoting Kristeva she writes: "Abjection (....) is the subconscious invocation of revulsion as a means of self-preservation – it is a response, a defense mechanism that rejects that which is 'not me' from the body." Bick also points at the ruptures in the boys' bodies and she interprets them as a kind of implosion or split of the bodies. According to Bick these holes "suggest that their abject horror has not only corrupted them into evil, twisted torturers but has also turned their own beings against themselves[84]." However, my feeling is (and it cannot be anything than a feeling) that the abject in *Butcher Boys* is not necessarily evil. The sculptured creatures are rather a visualisation of the abject itself and its horror. That may turn into evil and an unpredictable, decomposing or damaging factor. Alexander was confronted with the extreme violence in her country, provoked and perpetrated by her own 'white tribe'. *Butcher Boys* can be seen

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[80] Bick 2010, p. 30. "The Boys (....) seem to manifest the disfigured social body of South Africa under apartheid;".

[81] See note 76.

[82] Kristeva 1982, pp. 1-31.

[83] Kristeva 1982, p. 1.

[84] Bick 2010, p. 33

as a reaction to that, but *Butcher Boys* may also be recognisable for anyone as the ultimate abject in oneself. Again it should also be noted that the three figures have white skins. The colour of the skins may be seen as whitened, they may refer to white as a colour of death, but white they are. It is the abjection, again, of the authorities who have clung to the abject to maintain power, and by the authorities for what they were doing and provoking at the time, but also of any authorities that behave in that way, whether they are colonial or post-colonial, white or black or with any other skin colour. In *Butcher Boys* the abject is white but it could be part of anyone. More important even, it also seems to look like an abjection of oneself, a recognition by Alexander of the horrible deeds of her own 'tribe', and a recognition that this abjection may be part of one's own character.

In *Race of Man* abjection, toward the end of the narrative, undoubtedly becomes part of the viewer, at least in my case, in an ongoing narrative in which survival is linked to the rules, or rather the contingency of consumer competition. Linking this narrative to violence makes it very different from Alexander's *Butcher Boys. Butcher Boys* finds the abject in the appearance of its protagonists. The sculpture shows the violent unpredictability with the abject appearances of the three figures themselves. The work also has a monumental, commemorative quality. Alexander's sculpture, although the figures can still be very much appreciated as a warning for the abject, is also linked to the period in which it was made. The violence of late apartheid conveyed the urgency of the work. *Race of Man* does not monumentalise or commemorate anything. Even its protagonists are not abject in their appearances, they look perfectly 'normal', they even appear to be acting 'normally', however horrific their activities are. Discernible abjection only really comes toward the bloody end of the video. In spite of it being rather 'morally unmonumental' and certainly uncommemorative, *Race of Man* is still linked to a certain period in time, to the digital age and, as a work made by a South African artist, to the post-apartheid period, although the narrative of post-apartheid and post-colonialism seems to be present indirectly. The abjection in it is not in the actors but in the storyline. Whether MacGarry shows feelings of abjection about his own white 'tribe' in *Race of Man* is not clear. Where *Butcher Boys* tell the viewer, as it were 'look how abject we are!', or 'do not unleash us, as we are also part of you!', *Race of Man* seems in the first place to accept that violence is part of the story and that it can reveal certain aspects of life, even in a highly sophisticated postmodern life that is dictated by technology and consumerism. Where one can see a moral warning in the abjection in *Butcher Boys*, *Race of Man* by its postmodern aesthetics seems to ask for acceptance of the revelatory qualities of the abject. That is even more so in *Ke Kgomo ya moshate* with its formalised aesthetics that is not there just to make the work beautiful. Its aesthetics even seems to try to resist the abject and to become a kind of transcendence in the more or less stylised violence as visualised, which is a completely different story compared to the directness of the abject in *Butcher Boys.* Comparing *Ke Kgomo ya moshate* as a work about 'blackness' again to *Race of Man* as a work about 'whiteness' MacGarry's recognisable characters of flesh and blood are open to abjection, but they do not look abject. There is still some of the abjection of *Butcher Boys* in them, although it is really '*in*' them: Alexander's boys *look* abject, the men in *Race of Man* may *be* abject. They may not just be abject, they are also 'abjected' by the directions given by the voice of the game.

The abjection of *Butcher Boys* seems to have been internalised in both works by MacGarry and Modisakeng. In MacGarry's it has become part of the story in Modisakeng's it seeks to be overcome, in both works it results in violence and violence has become part of the aesthetics of both works.

Conclusions

As both the interpretations of the word 'violence' and Johan Galtung's theory have given an insight in what violence is, they have also given a key to analysing Michael MacGarry's video *Race of Man* and its background. Galtung sees violence as an 'influence relationship' between three elements: the influencer or subject, the influencee or object and the influencing or the action. The influencing is obvious in *Race of Man*, but the status of the protagonists as influencers of influencees is unclear. The props in the work, the weapons are, related to the 2011 movie *District 9* by Neill Blomkamp, a very violent science fiction movie playing in a present day but also fictional Johannesburg, while also referring to the apartheid era. This gives *Race of Man* a wider referential, historical basis. This also makes *Race of Man* a post-colonial work, though Achille Mbembe's theories about the post-colony are not immediately clear in *Race of Man*. However Mbembe does speak about the chaotic and excessive political and social situation in post-colonies in which the "founding violence" of the colony is taken over by the new political elite and becomes strongly exorbitant, even grotesque. That also brings to light the special situation of South Africa, as the protagonists who practice the violence in *Race of Man* are white and as such they are both the former colonisers but also part of the present day elite. MacGarry also gives a wider connotation as he also fetishises the prop-weapons with nails, a reference to Central African fetish statues and objects. This puts the 'whiteness' in *Race of Man* in a wider, not just South African perspective in a sense that white men in the post-colonial and postmodern period are living in a game of life and death situation and seem to do so with their own consent and full of camaraderie. The story of the 'whiteness' in *Race of Man* is one of perpetual violence, but, as there are only white protagonists, it is not violence against blacks or 'blackness', and although there is bloody killing in the loop of the story there seem to be no real victims as the situation automatically renews itself.

Comparing *Race of Man* with Mohau Modisakeng's *Ke Kgomo ya moshate* especially stresses the 'whiteness' of MacGarry's actors as opposed to the'blackness' in Modisakeng's performance. Not just because the protagonists are obviously black in the latter and white in the first, but also in their post-colonial implications. Modisakeng's performance shows another perspective of violence in 'blackness'. It seems to try to elevate or transcend violence in an aesthetically stylised way to become part of a consciousness of becoming and being black. The violence in it is far more metaphorical in its presentation than the bloodiness of the violence in *Race of Man*. Nothing about that can be said in general of course but each of the works deals with its own skin colour, which may be remarkable in country that not long ago still called itself the Rainbow nation[85]. *Race of Man* does not give any clue about white men living together with for instance black men, neither does *Ke Kgomo ya moshate* so vice versa. At least in these two works the artists seem to concentrate on the position of either being white or being black, maybe even a kind of refinding one's own identity as such. In the case of these two works that goes along with violence. Violence seems to work as a crowbar to defining of what 'whiteness' and 'blackness' are. In the case of *Race of Man* one may suggest the violence is cynical.

[85] The term was coined by archbishop Tutu after the elections of 1994. Even in 2012 an exhibition of South African art in Museum Beelden aan Zee in The Hague was called *The Rainbow Nation*.

That may or may not be true, but the inevitability of the violence seems to be the main aspect, reinforced by the voice who instructs the protagonists. The influence of the voice can be seen as structural violence. Although the voice is not recognisable as a white or a black voice, one has to suppose it is the voice of a white man as the whole concept of modernism, postmodernism and consumerism is seen as an invention of white men. In *Ke Kgomo ya moshate* one can also discern an influencer of structural violence in the person of the artist himself who sheds the charcoal on the table of the other two actors. It also shows that both works have aspects in common in spite.

A comparison with *Butcher Boys* by Jane Alexander brings in another historic perspective and the idea of abjection. *Butcher Boys* looks explicitly abjective and uses that to confront the viewer and, as a sculpture, let the viewer feel its presence. Generally I may say that speaking about the representation of violence in *Butcher Boys* Galtung's divisions and definitions are helpful but they definitely lack the idea of the abject as Kristeva has described it. Of course the abject is more difficult to indicate than an influencer or an influencee, but in *Butcher Boys* is made visible by partly reconstructing the human body with animal features. One could say the abject is an agent for the visualisation of violence in *Butcher Boys* as the work shows no personal violence. The abject is also an agent toward the viewer who in that way 'feels' the abject of the violence. The idea of violence in *Butcher Boys* is more informed by abjection as described by Kristeva than by Galtung's systematic theory. Neither do the three characters of *Butcher Boys* act according to a voice like in *Race of Man* or a third person like the artist in *Ke Kgomo ya moshate*. There is no influencer of structural violence, there is no one who tells them what to do and of course, they do nothing. The only potential action, or influencing, can be in the mind of the viewer, who feels the horror when looking at the three boys. As it has been made in the colonial days of apartheid and was inspired by the monstrosity of that system, there is also a moral aspect to *Butcher Boys*. It does not have the bravura or pomposity of many a war monument, it shows, in fact, nothing to be proud of, but it does contain a moral authority in that it suggests a warning against the abject. That aspect seems to be lacking in MacGarry's video and Modisakeng's performance. Neither do MacGarry or Modisakeng glorify the violence that occurs in their works. In these works both artists remain at least ambiguous about their morality. There seems to be the main difference between the two later works and Alexander's *Butcher Boys*. There is another aspect: *Butcher Boys*, in its abjectivity, depends on animalisation, while in the two later works animalisation plays no role at all. Both works are clearly conceived to be about humans, white and black humans and their subsequent positions in life.

In my comparison between *Race of Man* and *Ke Kgomo ya moshate* in Chapter two I mention eight similarities in the two works. Some of them are also valid for a comparison with *Butcher Boys*. Like the two later works *Butcher Boys* seems to be carefully conceived with a thought through technique. Though the work is very expressive there is no blunt expressionism that depends on impulsiveness and radical improvisation, and there are no clearly indicated influencers or influencees. However, the most significant similarity seems to me that in all works violence is a strictly male business. Of course this only happens in these three works which says nothing about gender based violence the South African artistic output in general, but I think the observation is at least significant. In all three works as they seem to be so well thought through, it must be at least a statement that there

are no female features of any kind in them. There is neither suffering nor complicity by women in the three works. To Alexander the abjection, by that time, could not be given a shape other than male. Moreover the *Butcher Boys* are white males in spite of the fact that they can also be seen as general imaginations of abjection and looming violence. Also the perpetual game of life and death in MacGarry's video is an all white male game. One could say even reproduction has lost its femininity as the game constantly and automatically starts again by means of modern technology. The absence of the feminine in *Ke Kgomo ya moshate* is more enigmatic although the struggle for power is clearly again male in which the adopted white features (their shirts) also become black through the violence.

A last aspect which came up at the very beginning of this thesis is the sense of white guilt, specifically in Kendell Geers *'Title Withheld (Nek)*. It should be said that in neither of the discussed works by MacGarry, Modisakeng or Alexander there is any indication of guilt even though both Alexander and MacGarry have had a privileged white background. It may well be that both Alexander and MacGarry have inherited a sense of guilt from the apartheid era, directly or indirectly, but that has not become visible in either *Butcher Boys* or in *Race of Man*. In Geers' *Title Withheld (Nek)* guilt has become part of the form and content of the work, while *Butcher Boys* seems to be about the abject of colonial violence and *Race of Man* seems to be about the recognition of violence in the history and presence of post-colonial violence. Moreover, as for MacGarry, he seems to be quite pragmatic about the fact that he is a white South Africa in the videoed 2015 interview[86]: "I think you can't help it being a South African artist, because I am South African." In my interpretation this quotation in relation to *Race of Man* stresses the blunt fact of being a white artist in present day South Africa and accepting (albeit critically) the violent history of that fact.

Bertus Pieters

[86] See note 54, Chapter two.

Appendix

Michael MacGarry was born in 1978 in Durban in what is now KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, and he is currently living in Johannesburg. He has a BFA of Technikon Natal (2000), an MFA of Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg (2004) and he is a fellow of the Gordon Institute of Performing and Creative Arts at the University of Cape Town (2012).

According to his website his "practice is focused on researching narratives and histories of socio-economics, politics and objects within the context of Africa, principally in spaces where contemporary life is in a state of invention and flux." In practice this means he makes objects, photographs, videos and installations which are substantively about the post-colonial condition in Africa. MacGarry began his creative life as a designer. While initially not being able financially to work on the bigger projects he had in mind, he started making objects and sculptures that would feature in these bigger projects. These works, as art works in themselves, gained some success in the art world and now he has been able to make the more ambitious films and videos alongside sculptures and installations for the last decade or so. His sculptures are often featured in exhibitions together with his films, blurring the limitations of the different disciplines and adding to each other's content.
Often his works have a strong sense of fetishisation. Of course this applies to the weaponry used in *Race of Man*, as discussed in this thesis, but also for many other works, especially objects. These may differ from found objects to meticulously constructed ones. For instance *AU* (2008) (fig. 17) is a found object, a white car door with the blue letters 'AU' on it, 'AU' being of course the symbol of gold, and gold being an important source of wealth in South African history, but also the abbreviation for 'African Union'. *Ossuary* (2009/2010) (fig. 18) shows a collection of ivory carved objects like a Mercedes-Benz mark, brass knuckles, glasses, a pair of dices, a comb etc., carefully laid together as a set of relics. The ivory is of course a valuable product from, amongst others, African elephant and hippo teeth, while an ossuary is a burial place for human bones in for instance churches. Apart from the video *Race of Man* there are more videos, and also (since 2011) photo books, that deal with the condition of post-colonial Africa. In a more recent two channel video work, *Parang* (2017) he also makes his own family history part of his narrative. Himself being the son of an Irish born architect who grew up in Malaysia, MacGarry features in this work amongst others architecture in Singapore, Brazil, Durban and Johannesburg which was or is important to his father, to himself and to his young son. Architecture, especially modernist and present day architecture play a big role in many of his photo and video works. Derelict modernist architecture from the days of apartheid in Pretoria plays a central role in his video *Flies* (2014), in which the building seems to be a foreshadowing of present day post-colonial violence; while his artist's book *The Republic of Luanda* (2011), the video *Excuse me, while I disappear* (2015) and the photo book *Kilamba Kiaxi* (2016) have a newly built city near Angola's capital Luanda as a subject. The new city was built by a Chinese company, the influence of the Chinese in present day Africa being another point of interest for MacGarry. Many African governments attract Chinese investments in Africa in all fields of life which brings another perspective to European colonialism in Africa and a wider perspective to MacGarry's work in terms of post-colonial society and globalisation. Apart from his work as an artist he also makes TV-commercials.

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Fig 1: Kendell Geers, *Self-Portrait*, part of a broken Heineken beer bottle, 9,5 x 7,5 x 6 cm, 1995, collection of the artist

Fig. 2: Michael MacGarry, still from *Race of Man*, HD video, 12 min. 30 sec., 2011

Fig. 3: Michael MacGarry, still from *Race of Man*

Fig. 4: Mohau Modisakeng, *Ke Kgomo ya moshate*, performance, 27 February 2016, Galerie Ron Mandos, Amsterdam

Fig. 5. Jane Alexander, *Butcher Boys*, mixed media, 128,5 x 213,5 x 88,5 cm, 1985-86, Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town

Fig. 6: Armando, *Gefechtsfeld*, 272 x 189 cm, oil on canvas, 1984, Museum Het Valkhof, Nijmegen

Fig. 7: Ronald Ophuis, *Srebrenica II*, 340 x 480 cm, oil on canvas, 2006, Upstream Gallery, Amsterdam

Fig. 8:. Michael MacGarry, *Motorcycle Fetish*, 108 x 205 x 74 cm, found objects and mixed media, 2012, private collection

Fig. 9: Nkishi figure, Democratic Republic of Congo, 47 x 24 x 22 cm, wood metal, private collection, The Hague

Fig. 10: Michael MacGarry, *Private Grammar 1*, 46 x 135 x 21 cm, original prop from film *District 9* with nails, screws and epoxy, 2011, artist's collection

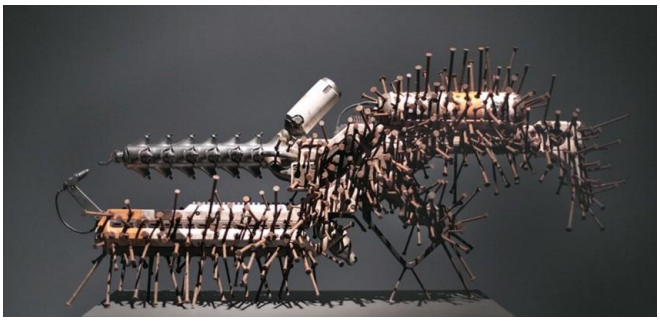

Fig. 11: Michael MacGarry, *Level 9*, 51 x 110 x 27 cm, original prop from film *District 9* with nails, screws and epoxy, 2011, artist's collection

Fig. 12: Michael MacGarry, *Howitzer Fetish*, 140 x 360 x 480 cm, laser-cut steel, found objects, mixed media, 2010, Schachat collection, Johannesburg

Fig. 13: Michael MacGarry, still from *Race of Man*

Fig. 14: Mohau Modisakeng, *Untitled (Metamorphosis 7)*, 120 x 120 cm, ink-jet print, 2015

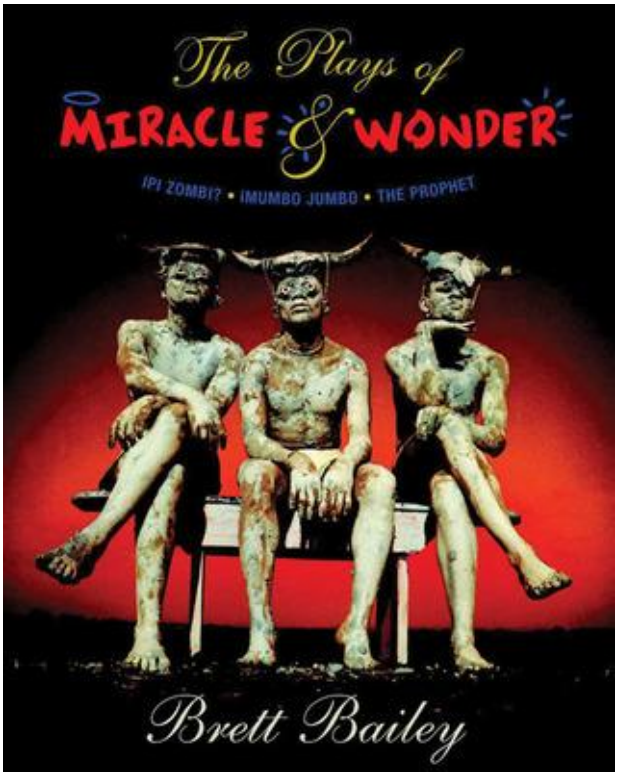

Fig. 15: Book cover of *Plays of Miracle and Wonder* by Brett Bailey, 2003, designer unknown


Fig. 16: Jane Alexander, *Butcher Boys*, rear view

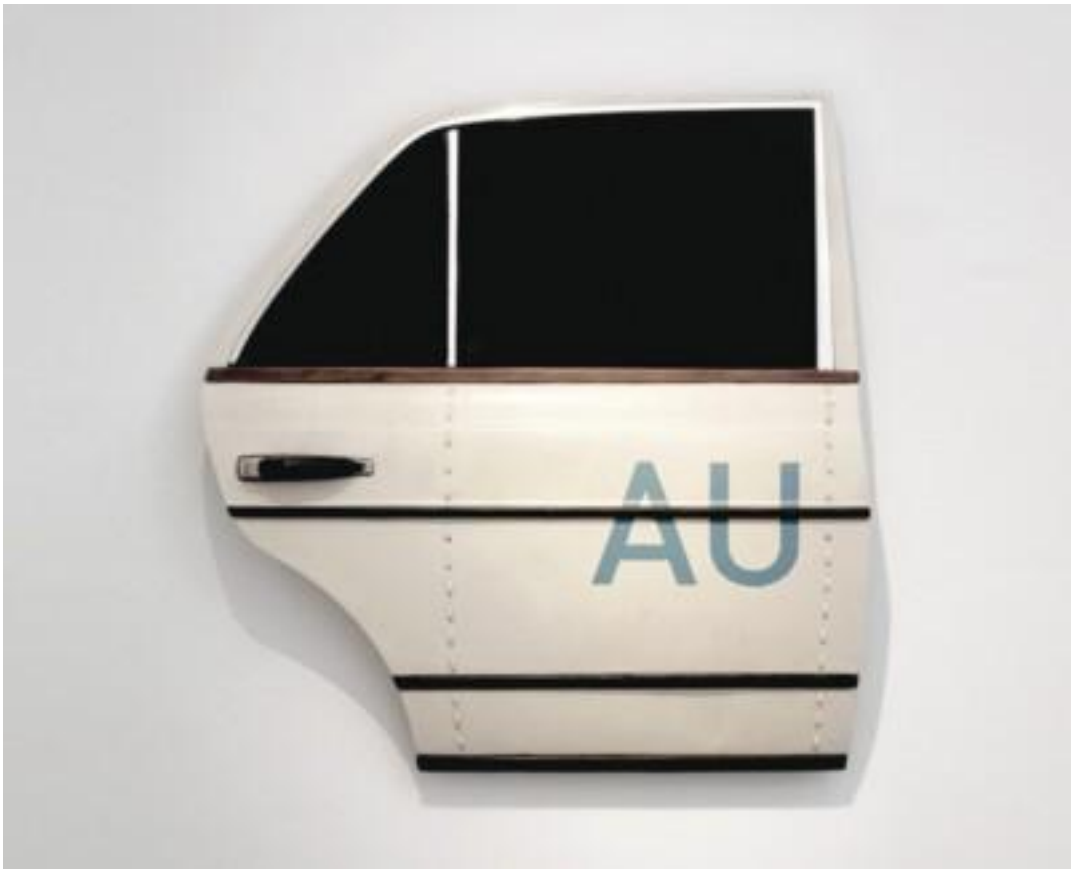

Fig. 17: Michael MacGarry, *AU*, 102,5 x 100 x 15,5 cm, found object, oil and enamil paint, wood, leather, 2008, private collection

Fig. 18: Michael MacGarry, *The Ossuary*, 88 x 50 x 92 cm, ivory, steel, perspex, felt, wood, 2009-10, private collection