Basquiat's and Ofili's Double Consciousness: An Exploration of Transnational Black Identity Through African Diasporic Art.

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July 31, 2020

Abstract

People of African descent in the West share a similar experience of oppression through European colonization and the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Such a shared experience has led to a transnational black consciousness. The black scholars W.E.B. DuBois and Frantz Fanon both discussed this concept, which describes an the existence of transnational black solidarity and identity, due to the subjugation to oppression. The black race has become the subject of negative discourses, a product of white supremacy and western hegemony. This thesis is a postcolonial reading of the artworks of black American artist Jean-Michel Basquiat and the Black British artist Chris Ofili, through which we explore the transnational connection among the peoples of the African diaspora. With the use of semiotic analysis, we uncover the hidden meanings within Basquiat's and Ofili's work, analyzing the themes of being black in the West and being black in connection to the African diaspora.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels one's twoness – an American and a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife – this longing … to merge his double self into a better and truer self. – W.E.B. DuBois (1903, 16-17).

> The black man has two dimensions. One with his fellows, the other with the white man. A Negro behaves differently with a white man and with another Negro. That this self-division is a direct result of colonialist subjugation is beyond question…. No one would dream of doubting that its major artery is fed from the heart of those various theories that have tried to prove that the Negro is a stage in the slow evolution of monkey into man. – Frantz Fanon ([1956] 2008, 8).

The two excerpts above describe a feeling that is not foreign to many people of African descent who find their homes in western parts of our world. W.E.B. DuBois and Frantz Fanon, two of the most influential black scholars of the twentieth century, exposed an inner conflict that is seen as a direct consequence of European imperialism and colonialism. In DuBois' most famous work, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), he describes his concept of 'double consciousness,' which he initially only applied to the black population in the United States (DuBois 1903). African Americans are forced to have double social identities, one that correlates with white perspectives of them, and one that is their own, personal identity. These white perspectives derive from the

outside society, are forced upon them and are negative (Black 2007, 393). Due to this double consciousness and two identities, African Americans struggle with who one is as a person and how one is portrayed within society. In this manner, DuBois spoke of an internal conflict, or psychological challenge, one that he himself also struggled with, living in an American society that had only recently abolished slavery and where one's race still largely determined one's position in society.

Fifty years after DuBois published *The Souls of Black Folk,* the French West Indian psychiatrist and philosopher Frantz Fanon, wrote his book *Black Skin, White Masks* (1956), in which he addressed a very similar theme to that of DuBois. Fanon grew up in the French colony of Martinique, but moved to France in his twenties to attend the university of Lyon, where he experienced first-hand what it meant to be a black person in a western nation like France. After he graduated university, Fanon went on to work as a doctor in Algeria, also under French rule at the time (Moore 2005, 755). It was through his own personal experiences in these different places that Fanon developed his understanding of race. Fanon analyzed the psychological ramifications of European colonial rule for black people. He applied the concept of double consciousness to the black inhabitants of his homeland Martinique. Here he saw how the presence of the French had affected the self-identity and consciousness of the Afro-Caribbean people, which had strong similarities to how DuBois described the plight of African Americans.

Even though DuBois and Fanon wrote about their own black communities, those located in the U.S. and in the Caribbean, both scholars eventually developed their argument to be adopted globally. After the publication of *The Souls of Black Folk,* DuBois advocated for a transnational consciousness, one that explained how "[black] identity, solidarity, and political subjectivity operated beyond the nation-state" (Valdez 2019, 119). It did not replace his previous concept, but actually "added to this form of identification by acting upon shared values and/or goals with

subjects located throughout the world" (Valdez 2019, 119). It was through transnational black solidarity and networks that were rooted in the rejection of colonial culture, that such a transnational, black consciousness could develop. Consequently, a new sense of belonging and a shared racial identity emerged, which in turn also fueled different emancipation movements across the world. The work of Frantz Fanon did indeed show that black people in the Caribbean were experiencing a similar feeling to those in the United States, and other anti-colonial scholars soon followed with their own analysis on identity and consciousness for black people in the West (Gilroy 1993; Black 2007; Sawyer 2008). While colonialism and racism may have had different ramifications across the African diaspora, black people seem to struggle with the similar issues, living in societies where whiteness is standardized, and in which being black automatically signifies being the "Other" (Stolton 2020).

Often, when scholars discuss the connection and shared values of black people transnationally, they speak of the African diaspora; a group of peoples with African origin, who have been dispersed over the world, both through voluntary and involuntary migration (Boyce Davies 2008). Despite their geographical distance, the African diaspora is strongly connected through a shared history and experience of oppression. Reasonably, it is due to their similar experiences, that people of the African diaspora experience comparable feelings of double consciousness. However, we also have to mention that there are many differences within the diaspora that are sometimes overlooked. Due to their shared experience and marginalization, the African diaspora is often spoken of and represented as a singular, rather homogenous entity. Their identity is strongly racialized, as it was their race that underpinned continued colonial subjugation within and outside of Africa (Valdez 2019, 119). While this unifying of experience is obviously reductionist in some measures, their shared identity has in turn allowed for the creation of a diaspora that is strongly connected across the world.

While both DuBois and Fanon used their writing to unpack and articulate their experience of being black, so too have other creatives. Artists of all disciplines often view their work as an outlet to express their inner most thoughts and beliefs about themselves and the world around them. For instance, Toni Morrison and James Baldwin are among a group of talented African American writers who published works of literature to describe their experience of being black in twentieth century America, most often through the eyes of their fictional characters. We could also mention Arnaldo Roche Rabell, an Afro-Latino visual artist from Puerto Rico, who used his artwork to explore the process of identity formation for marginalized people in other parts of the diaspora (Dimitriadis and McCarthy 2001). And a more recent example is found in Ryan Coogler's film *Black Panther*, which not only dealt with the theme of being of African descent, both in the US and in Africa, but also portrayed black people as superheroes and royalty, positive images that are scarce in the western entertainment industry (Wallace 2018). Such works of art are important, both for the marginalized and dominant groups in society, because they offer a multidimensional image of black life. While some of the works may provide a realistic view of black life, others create positive and power images about people of African descent. As a whole, they are sources of reference that black people may be able to relate to or excerpt power from, while also offering the white majority a chance to learn more about the experiences of the black minority.

This thesis aims to explore the connection of the African diaspora and their shared experience of transnational double consciousness, specifically those located in the West. Through the semiotic analysis of paintings, we examine how transnational double consciousness is represented in visual art. When we employ DuBois' transnational concept of double consciousness to the black experience, we thus deal with two different aspects: the consciousness that is concerned with one's position in a white-dominated world as a black individual, and the connection one has with an imagined, global community that is the African diaspora. By

comparing the artwork of artists from different parts of the African diaspora, we examine the connectedness of the diaspora and the transnational double consciousness through their reflection on blackness.

The significance of such analysis is two-fold. Firstly, it contributes to an academic field that has been strongly Eurocentric. Exposing the experience of double consciousness from the perspective of people of color to a white-dominated field and society eventually enables more critical interracial dialogue. Such dialogue may lead to new insights concerning the racial power relations that have been in place since the epoch of European imperialism, and offer solutions to the current structure of white supremacy. Furthermore, the exploration of "double consciousness" may be even more important today, as there is continued critique of the assumed colorblindness and post-racial status of society in academic dialogue. Even though the important works of DuBois and Fanon were published over 50 and 100 years ago, the idea of "double consciousness" is still as relevant as ever. Today, black people in the West still face this internal conflict as they navigate societies that are dominated by a white majority and in which they still face racism, simply for being black. The recent global protests, which erupted after the death of the African American George Floyd, are a real example of this. They have shown the strong diasporic connection, as well as the continuing shared experiences of racism across the African diaspora. While the tragic killing of Floyd happened in the state of Minnesota in the United States, marches and protests took place from Amsterdam to Sydney to Accra to Rio de Janeiro. The 'Black Lives Matter' slogan, that came into being to draw attention to police brutality against black Americans in the U.S., is now used across the world, not only in solidarity to the situation in the U.S., but also to address the oppression and violence against black communities in one's own nations (Daragahi 2020). In turn, the black people rallying for George Floyd still experience the inner conflict that we have

identified as double consciousness. Even in 2020, people of African descent continue to struggle with their personal identity, all because they are black in a white-dominated society.

While we may argue that such a global outbreak proves that a more emotional, sensitive connection among members of the African diaspora exists, there has yet to be substantial analysis on it. This is due to the "ephemeral nature of emotions", which has also led to the exclusion of emotions in IR in general (Crawford 2000, 118). However, including the role of emotions in the study of International Relations is critical, because it enables us to learn about the political, including world events and communities, beyond their prevalent rationalist models (Bleiker 2018). Art, as a tool of representation, may allow us insight in this shared experience of being of African descent in the world. Through art, we are able to imagine and gain awareness of what it means to be a member of the African diaspora on a psychological and emotional level, including the subjection to oppression or marginalization but also their connection to each other and to Africa. Furthermore, gaining understanding on the human experience of 'being black' also raises consciousness on the racial injustice, that is still largely present in today's world.

BEING BLACK IN WESTERN SOCIETY AND IR

Defining the African diaspora

Peoples of African descent are found all over the world, and the different places they call home are a result of several migration waves. However, not all migrations actually create a diaspora. Palmer (2018) states that members of a diaspora generally possess "a sense of "racial," ethnic, or religious identity that transcends geographic boundaries" (216). Members of the African diaspora are not ethnically the same. Unlike the well-studied Jewish diaspora, people of African descent are not connected through a shared religion, nor do they share a unifying text such as the Torah (Palmer 2018; Valkeakari 2017). Furthermore, race is a social construct, thus categorizing individuals on the basis of this concept is ever-changing and flawed. Nevertheless, people of African descent are still seen as part of a diaspora, due to a shared history and the consciousness of a common origin and their dispersal from it. This common origin is the continent of Africa. However, when we consider Africa in relation to the Africa diaspora, rather than simply viewing it as a bounded geographical entity, Africa serves as a social construct, an ancestral land people aim to return to, sometimes physically, but also on an emotional or psychological basis (Harris 1993; Palmer 2018; Valkeari 2017). Hamilton (1995) also characterizes the African diaspora by its resistance and political action against social oppression. Due to their geospatial displacement, many communities of the African diaspora have dealt with such oppression in the countries they reside in. However, it is also important to note that not all diasporic communities possess every characteristic, nor do all share the same level of kinship with Africa and other people of African descent. Thus, the African diaspora is much more a symbolic or imagined community (Palmer 2018, 216).

There are many different characteristics that are used to define the African diaspora. Yet,

a clear, fundamental definition does not exist. This is due to the fact that there is no consensus on which communities of African descent to include. Boyce Davies (2008) includes four different groups to the diaspora; those people who were dispersed

> through (a) voluntary means (economic and pre-Columbian exploratory journeys); (b) trade, servitude, and military expeditions (early Indian Ocean trade journeys from the sixth century); (c) forced migrations (transatlantic slavery over least four centuries in the modern period, from the 15th to the 19th centuries); and (d) induced migration, the more recent 20th- and 21st-century migrations of African peoples based on world economic imbalances (2008, xxxiv).

While Boyce Davies does not mention it in her definition, the last group (d) would also include those people who have been dispersed due to political turmoil or warfare. Even though Boyce Davies' definition is all-inclusive, not all scholars agree with the scope of it. Africans have indeed migrated across the globe since the beginning of mankind, but many scholars have defined the diaspora to solely include those communities who have been dispersed through forced exodus, i.e. the trans-Atlantic slave trade. While this may be somewhat of a narrow definition, the African diaspora has largely been determined by the slave trade as it caused the largest immigration of Africans out of the continent (Rotimi et al. 2016, 2). Furthermore, some of the characteristics discussed above, such as geosocial displacement and social oppression, are primarily consequences of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Created in the fifteenth century, the trans-Atlantic slave trade existed for four centuries, connecting Africa with the Americas and Europe. A "triangle trade" brought European slave traders to Africa to trade manufactured goods for African slaves, who were then shipped to the Americas to perform labor. From here, the colonial produce was brought back to Europe, generating major profits for European nations (Stubblefield 2005, 30). An estimated total of ten

to fifteen million enslaved Africans were forcefully removed from the continent and shipped across the Atlantic (Stubblefield 2005, 31). However, European colonization (and later decolonization) of Africa also led to large movements out of the continent, as people left for the West for economic purposes.

Due to the impact of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Rotimi et al. (2016) are among those scholars who define the African diaspora to include "all global communities descended from the historic migration of peoples from Africa since the 15th century (p. 2). Palmer (2018) on the other hand, does not exclude earlier migration waves, but does distinguish between a pre-modern and modern African diaspora, determined by the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Another term that has been popularized is the "Black Atlantic," which specifically focuses on the black communities located in the parts of the world that were connected through the triangle trade: the Americas and Europe (Gilroy 1993). Overall, it is evident that academia on the African diaspora has emphasized the trans-Atlantic slave trade and with that, those diasporic communities that are located in the West.

Subjugation to white supremacy

As was characterized in the definition of the African diaspora, the trans-Atlantic slave trade and European imperialism and colonialism led to the oppression of people of African descent. In order to understand the subjugation, we must look back to the period of Enlightenment, where philosophers began to consider the identity of the European man. During this time, discourses on European civilization and the European man as "its highest achievement" were developed (Wright 2004, 29). Such thinking was a result of the new transnational links established through European imperialism and the new foreign civilizations they encountered. The idea of white, European civilization at the center of the world also entailed that there had to be an antithesis of a non-

European, black 'Other' (Wright 2004; Gilroy 1993). Thus, while the white European was seen as civilized, the black Other was viewed as primitive. One of the most influential discourses on the 'black Other' was developed by the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. In his *Philosophy of History*, Hegel viewed the black man as "the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state." In such a state, the black man needed western civilization to rescue him from his own chaos (Hegel and Sibree 1956). In turn, Hegel's ideology was used to justify and sustain the global system of slavery. Not only would black mankind benefit from its contact with European civilization, they were also believed to enjoy the position of servitude (Wright 2004; Stubblefield 2005). Even more so, people of African descent were believed to be divinely created for agricultural labor, simply because their dark skin was made to protect them against the sun (Stubblefield 2005, 32).

As colonialism took place in other parts of the world as well, a global color line emerged and both white people and non-white people were divided according to racial classifications (Irzigsohn and Brown 2020, 19). These classifications were hierarchical, with superior white race on top while the darkest race, the black race was placed at the lowest level. Furthermore, Rotimi et al. (2016) state that the racialization of people of African descent also explains why the African diaspora is sometimes referred to as the "Black diaspora," as it was the "important roles of blackness, slavery, colonialism, racism, and geography played in sustaining the trans-Atlantic slave trade" (p. 2). And regardless of the fact that the African diaspora is extremely ethnically and genealogically diverse, the historical ideology of the 'black Other' has also led to the widespread belief that black people are a largely homogenous group. People of the diaspora are primarily identified as 'black', regardless of the many different hues in which their skin may come (Wright 2004, 2).

These racist discourses were also found in the academic field of International Relations. IR is strongly Eurocentric and has been this way since its inception. American and European scholars have taken a central role in IR, dominating the field with a western perspective, including western values and interests (Vucetic and Persaud 2018, 36). Vucetic and Persaud show how scholars of the West portray the "Third World", also known as the rest, the East or the Global South, to be backwards and inferior. These ideas thus corresponded with Hegel's ideology on the primitive black man. Vitalis (2016) argues that IR was developed as a discipline dedicated to "race development." For instance, one of the most well-known journals of International Relations, *Foreign Affairs*, was first named *Journal of Race Development* when it was established in 1910. Its main objectives was to present the best ideas and methods on how to help develop the peoples of the "under-developed" colonies and races, known as the "Third World." Thus, the inception of International Relations was not so much focused on the "international," but rather the "intra-racial," aiming to maintain the dominate status of the West and protecting the global system of white supremacy. A system that is responsible for the oppression for black people (Vitalis 2016; Vucetic and Persaud 2018; Anievas et al. 2014).

Even after the abolishment of colonialism and slavery, the need for western self-definition did not disappear. And thus, in order to maintain the image of being advanced and superior, discourses on the "black Other" persevered. While they may have adopted a more nuanced form, racial stereotypes of people of African descent are still rooted in savagery and a lack of 'civilized restrained' (Hall 1997, 243). Today, the existence of such widespread racist ideologies about the superiority of the white race is known as white supremacy (Rosa and Diaz 2019). It is important to grasp that white supremacy moves beyond individual bigotry, and its consequences are much more structural. Here, we speak of institutional racism, as white supremacist ideology has seeped into every level of society, from media and education, to criminal justice reform and employment.

Even in places where the use of African slaves existed to a much lesser degree, such as the United Kingdom and the rest of Europe, the prevalent ideology of black racial inferiority still resulted in racist systems in their societies.

Thus, not only has the African diaspora dealt with racism and oppression in their daily lives, even in academia they are not able to escape these conditions. However, what complicates the improvement of social conditions for black people is the relatively recent phenomena of colorblind racism. During the twentieth century, several events around the world, such as the end of European colonialism, the defeat of Apartheid in South Africa, and the legal ban of anti-black discrimination in the United States, changed the overall view on race and racism. A narrative of color-blindness and post-racial societies was created and the racist ideologies of natural, white superiority and black primitivism were no longer considered as legitimate, nor were they widely accepted (Le Melle 2009, 77). While one might assume that such developments have only had positive effects on the social and political advancement of people of color, this is not particularly the case. Colorblind racism is defined as "the imagined perception and assertion of the existing sameness used to mask persistent reproductions of inequity between racial and ethnic groups at macro and micro levels of society (Bimper 2015, 227-8). While racism and racial ideology were no longer considered appropriate, a "norm against noticing" race became prevalent within both society and academia, discarding the influence that race may have both in society and academic fields such as International Relations (Vitalis 2000). Thus, colorblind racism eventually makes it more difficult to expose and understand both the continued oppressive experiences of black people, as well as their shared identity and unity.

The theory of postcolonialism exposes this "norm against noticing" race and explores the intersections of race, gender and culture within IR, while also examining the influence of historical

European colonialism on contemporary world politics (Persaud and Sajed 2018, 2). Postcolonial scholars argue that race, gender and culture are some of the most powerful social forces in our lives (Persaud and Sajed 2018; Chowdhry and Rai 2009). One could easily imagine this when we consider that race is a central aspect to the identity of the people of the African diaspora, and has determined much of their historical experiences and their current social conditions. Furthermore, postcolonial theory explores how the groups and individuals of marginalized races, genders or cultures may experience international relations. These explorations are extremely important for the African diaspora, especially for those located in the parts of the West, as the domination of white perspectives in these societies and academia has led to the underrepresentation of black perspectives. Chowdhry (2011) ascribes a few fundamental assumptions to the theory of postcolonialism. Firstly, the theory suggests that colonialism has had a critical impact on the modern world order. Next to this, it argues that, while colonialism may no longer exist, its implications are still present today. Thus, the critical theory of postcolonialism explores how colonialism has created certain discourses, and how the subjects of these discourses are still impacted. As we refer back to the previous section of the African diaspora, which discusses the persistence of white supremacist ideologies and emergence of color-blind racism, it is clear that Chowdhry's assumptions hold true for this global formation.

TRANSNATIONAL BLACKNESS

To understand the consequences of colonialism and slavery for people of African descent, postcolonial studies has extensively studied the emergence of transnational blackness and Pan-Africanism. While transnational white supremacy led to the exclusion and oppression of black people, it also fueled "new, transnational forms of resistance to racism" (Mullings 2008, 11). We could trace the emergence of these forms of resistance back to the idea of Pan-Africanism, "an ideology developed by the African-Diaspora and based on the fundamental proposition that people of African ancestry share a common historical experience during the rise of European mercantile expansion and imperial conquest of Africa" (Wahad 2008, 742). It was due to their common experiences and interests that people of African descent, both on the continent and in the diaspora, should be unified. Such unification would restore the basic humanity, but also the societal position of people of African descent.

It was during the height of European colonialism in Africa, the mid-19th century, that the ideal of Pan-Africanism first began to circulate. This early emergence of Pan-Africanism was mostly led by people in the African diaspora, more specifically in the United States, who witnessed both their situation at home and in other parts of the diaspora, as well as on the continent. It was clear to these thinkers and activists that, due to the white imperialism and a global racial hierarchy, people of African descent received the worse end of the deal wherever they lived. On the continent, Pan-Africanism led to the independence of African states and later, greater unification through the establishment of the African Union (Wahad 2008; Campbell 2010). However, for people of the African diaspora, Pan-Africanists scholars such as Frantz Fanon "sought to link the Pan-African project to the decolonization of the mind," (Campbell 2010, 1012). As an answer to the racialization and oppression of people of the African diaspora, the ideology of Pan-Africanism led to a strong rise in global black solidarity, as well as a growing connection to the continent of

African for the people of the African diaspora (Blau and Brown 2001; Valdez 2019). DuBois spoke of this new form of transnational, racial consciousness as he stated: "… the real essence of this [racial] kinship is its social heritage of slavery; the discrimination and insult; and this heritage… extends through Asia and into the South Seas. It is this unity that draws me to Africa" (Dubois 1940, 117).

However, while we focus on the construction of community, group identity and solidarity among the people of the African diaspora, we should once more emphasize that communities of the diaspora are extremely diverse. The impacts of European imperialism and white supremacy have manifested differently throughout the diaspora. The embodiment of its racialization was and is determined by local or national conditions and thus, being black does not result in one, global experience (Stephens 2009; Torres-Saillant 2009). Yet, according to the Afro-Caribbean scholar Stuart Hall (1990), it is actually the differences that characterize the African diaspora. It is through their diverse cultural, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds that the diaspora has created a unique culture in the West that is based on their shared experiences of colonialism, slavery and racism (Nehl 2016, 44).

Valdez agrees with Hall on the connectedness of the African diaspora and discusses the establishment of transnational links of solidarity, which may eventually lead to "emancipatory forms of political subjectivity" (2019, 4). She uses Shelby's definition to solidarity, which was based on links of solidarity among black people in the United States. Shelby includes five dimensions in his definition: "mutual identification, special concern or partiallly shared values or goals, loyalty, and mutual trust (Valdez 2019, 120; Shelby 2005). Valdez argues that the theory on black solidarity could easily apply transnationally, and thus to the African diaspora across the world (p. 121). In order to define solidarity in a transnational framework, she adopts two amendments to Shelby's solidarity framework. Firstly, all five dimensions do not necessarily have

to be present in order for links of solidarity to be established. Next to this, people may experience multiple links or forms of solidarity with different groups of people. When we view solidarity as such, transnational solidarity is possible and able to coexist with other forms of (national) solidarity or allegiance (Valdez 2019, 121). Thus, transnational links of solidarity can occur, even amongst a group so diverse as the African diaspora.

AESTHETICS AND RACE

The Role of Aesthetics

Aesthetics are one of the more recent subjects of analysis used for post-positivist approaches to IR. The use of aesthetics was introduced to study world events and has grown expeditiously during the last two decades. In what is called the 'aesthetic turn' in the discipline, a wide array of aesthetic modes from literature to photography to art to film have been marshalled to analyze world affairs (Bleiker 2009, 35). As a method of analysis, aesthetics is a critical, post-positivist approach that moves away from the idea of an ultimate truth and considers different, often underrepresented perspectives. It focuses on the role of meaning, interpretation and divergent lived experiences in the shaping of social life. Thus, the aesthetic approach very well fits a study on the experiences of a marginalized community, such as that of the African diaspora (Heywood 2014, 15). For the study of world politics in general, the aesthetic turn also indicated the recognition that "representing the political is a form of interpretation that is by its very nature, incomplete and bound up with the values of the perceiver" (Bleiker 2009, 20). The meaning of a representation is not only influenced by the event itself, but also by the producer and the receiver. Thus, this process of meaning may have very different outcomes, with diverse understandings of reality. One of the most influential theorists of aesthetics in world politics, Franklin R. Ankersmit (1996) examined politics from an aesthetics perspective and introduced the term "aesthetic gap," with which he refers to the space between the representation and what it represents. Scholarship on aesthetics and world politics is largely concerned with representation, because it recognizes that the aesthetic gap is inescapable. Even more so, it believes that the gap is the exact location where politics and power relations intersect (Ankersmit 1996; Ranciere 2004). Thus, while one may not initially link an approach of aesthetic sensibility to the study of IR, it is of great significance

because it helps expose the power relations that have such large scale consequences for the different communities in our world. Employing an aesthetic, cultural lens could broaden our understanding of global affairs and expose perspectives that are situated outside of the mainstream (Bleiker 2001). This may enable us to rethink some of the most serious issues in world politics. In a society embedded in white supremacy and institutional racism, the aesthetic gap thus exposes how aesthetics are used in the formation of western, white identity discussed above. Frantz Fanon emphasized the importance of aesthetics in understanding racial oppression and identity formation, as popular cultural forms endorsed racial discourses about people of African descent and naturalized white perspectives (Roelofs 2005, 101).

Art in IR:

One of the widely used aesthetic objects in international relations is art. The poet Marcel Proust best explained why art may have such a significant role in international relations:

> It is only through art that we can escape from ourselves and know how another person sees a universe which is not the same as our own and whose landscapes would otherwise have remained as unknown as any there may be on the moon. Thanks to art, instead of seeing only a single world, our own, we see it multiplied, and have at our disposal as many worlds as there are original artists, all more different one from another than those which revolve in infinity and which, centuries after the fire from which their rays emanated has gone out… still send us their special light (Proust [1927] 2002, 204-05).

With this quote, Proust addresses how different understandings, representations and perspectives may exist within international relations. Within critical IR, several turns have recently been taken – linguistic, cultural, aesthetic, visual, material – that have all used modes of art to analyze the

global order and its affairs (Lisle 2019, 92). However, similar to international relations, art can be many things and its definition is still debated. Lisle (2019) uses the term 'art' in its broadest sense and defines it as "creative expressions in visual, aural and performative registers" (p. 92). Scholars who are concerned with art and its relation to IR aim to understand how these creative expressions not only tell us something about world affairs, but also how they may dismantle, critique, and re-articulate the world (Danchev and Lisle 2009; Buckley 2010; Lisle 2019). In her article, Debbie Lisle explains how a traditional, distanced approach to art may help us understand global politics and all its complexities. Often, this is done through the use of discourse analysis and semiotics (Lisle 2019, 93). Through such analysis, we are able to expose how artistic texts have the power to create dominant views about world affairs. By examining the content and message of an artistic expression, but also the form in which this is done (e.g. filmed, painted, written down), we may identify the global power relations that are at play. Here, the construction of dominant ideologies is exposed and "assumed norms, hierarchies and authorities" are deconstructed (Lisle 2019, 94). An example of this is shown in Weber's (2008) critical investigation of Hollywood war films, and how these films constructed 'the moral grammar of war', "in which enlightened US do-gooders fight morally enlightened evil doers not for our own self-interest, but for the good of all humanity" (2008, 88). Through the repetition of the image of America as 'the moral savior' in popular films, American identity is reconstructed, which in turn influences its foreign policy (Weber 2008). And while Weber does not elaborately discuss the influence of national governments in these artistic expressions, it is not uncommon that states use art in popular culture for their own benefit. Weldes and Rowley (2015) argue that states use artistic modes, such as Hollywood films, to push their national and international agendas. During times of war, popular culture in the forms of posters and movies are used to define one's enemies, or to convince national or foreign publics to support the war. By observing wartime posters and films such as *Casablanca* (1942), *United 93* (2006),

we are able to identify how states may control the narrative and use art to spread it amongst their audiences (Weber 2008; Sennett 2009; Aulich 2011).

The examples presented above show how dominant, hegemonic forces employ the arts to construct certain discourses. However, art is not solely at the disposal of these groups. Rather, artistic expressions may also be used to uncover experiences of marginalized groups. Hozić (2019) argues that the analyses of discursive representations, such as visual art, have helped us understand the racial or gendered hierarchies as part of world politics and its power relations. However, she also argues that, while such analyses may have exposed inequalities, it has yet to have a significant effect on our international relations (2019, 106). Nevertheless, Hozić demonstrates how art analysis may help us expose the presence and experience of underrepresented, marginalized groups in international relations. She does so by examining the portrait "The Washington Family", currently displayed at the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. With a large, dark figure of a slave hidden in the background, the painting serves as an excellent example of "the systemic erasure of race and racism from the United States history and from Anglo-American scholarship on international relations" (2019, 109). Here, art and the scholarship of international relations are connected, on account of our desire to grasp the invisibility of the slave. In order to understand the invisibility in this work of art, we must examine the enterprise of slavery and western hegemony, together with its lasting effects on white supremacy (Hozić 2019, 110). Certainly, visual analysis has been fundamental for our understandings of race, as race itself is primarily thought of as a visual category (Smith 2004). Through the use of aesthetic modes as shown by Hozić (2019), the centrality of race and racism within international relations may be exposed (Henderson 2013, 71). In the next section, we will discuss two important black artists, part of the African diaspora in the West, who have contributed to our understanding of race and black identity, and whose art works will be the subject of analysis of this thesis.

The Artists

Jean-Michel Basquiat (United States of America)

Jean-Michel Basquiat was a visual artist from the United States, known for his expressionist art. He was born in Brooklyn, New York to his artistic Puerto Rican mother Matilde Andrades, and his Haitian father Gerard Basquiat (Emmerling 2003, 15). As the son of two black immigrants, Jean-Michel Basquiat was influenced by his Afro-Caribbean heritage, which was later shown through his artwork. However, Basquiat grew up with the experience of being a black man in America, and his direct connection with his Afro-Caribbean lineage was limited. His father's home country of Haiti was especially theoretical for Jean-Michel, as he had never visited the island and did not speak Creole. Yet, references to Haiti showed up in his work from time to time.

For Basquiat, being black was an important part of his identity, one that he spent much time thinking about. The artist grew up in Brooklyn, a place that was known for its difficult race relations. At school, Basquiat was bullied for being black and experienced much racism. Around him, he saw how the people who looked most like him were treated unjustly and this personal experience with racial inequality made Basquiat consider his own racial identity.

Basquiat emerged as a graffiti artist during the 1970s, when he used New York City's subway cars and street walls as his canvases. Here, he gave birth to his graffiti persona SAMO, which is an acronym for 'same old shit.' His graffiti was rather satiric and poetic, and Basquiat conceptualized SAMO as a new religion as well as a new art form. With SAMO, he attacked the values and ideals of a materialistic society and the art market (Emmerling 2003, 16). Ironically, Basquiat later brought SAMO to the New York art scene and used his persona as a rebellious graffiti artist to gain the interest of the wealthy, white artists and art collectors. Basquiat knew that this was a world in which artists like him did not belong. It was not uncommon for graffiti artists

of color to be noticed by the established art world. However, they could rarely transcend the graffiti label and disappeared from the scene as soon as interest in them was lost (Hoban 1998, 6). He was launched as a kind of black boy genius, with emphasis on his black identity. He understood that the art world's expectations were of him, as a black, half-Haitian, half-Puerto Rican man with dreadlocks. Portrayed as a 'street kid turned art prodigy', Basquiat knew how to successfully navigate his racial identity in the white art world. He gained the attention and respect of famous white artists such as Keith Haring and Andy Warhol. Simultaneously, Basquiat faced harsh criticism from those who compared him to his white counterparts and saw him as a fraud. While he did achieve success in the art world, Basquiat could never shake the label of a graffiti artist, which he felt was simply due to the color of his skin. His life ended tragically in 1988; at the age of 27, Basquiat died of a drug overdose. Many have argued that it was the art world's treatment of Basquiat that eventually led to his demise. Basquiat had always felt that he was primarily defined by his race, which eventually prevented him from fully being taken seriously by the white art scene.

Chris Ofili (United Kingdom)

Chris Ofili (October 1968) is a British visual artist of Nigerian descent. Ofili was born in Manchester, where he spent most of his childhood. In 1998, Ofili became the first black artist in history to ever be awarded the prestigious Turner Prize. Ofili broke onto the British art scene in the 90's, mostly recognized as the artist who shocked the world by using elephant dung and pornographic images in his painting *The Holy Virgin Mary* (1996). And while mainstream culture mostly knows him from his mixing of the profane with the sacred in his work, Ofili is an artist who finds his inspiration in countless sources, from "both African, European and Trinidadian traditions, contemporary popular culture and art history" (Figes 2019).

Contrary to the experience of most black British artist in the 1980s and 90s, Ofili was embraced by the art establishment early on in his career, both in the United Kingdom and internationally. His work has been added to the collections and exhibitions of some of the most renowned art museums and galleries in the world, from Tate Britain in London, to the MOMA in New York, and the Kestnergesellschaft in Hanover. However, similar to Basquiat, Chris Ofili's race is highlighted and due to his Nigerian heritage, he is often identified as an "African" artist (Cosentino 2000; Hynes 2001). This was not Ofili's intention. Surely, his art regularly focused on race and black heritage. Nevertheless, Ofili desired to be a versatile artists and just as frequently tackled topics on sexuality, religion and power. In 1995, Ofili was approached to be part of a research on West African artists in London. He declined, as he did not see himself as an African artist. Even though he was of Nigerian descent, he had visited Africa only once by that time and growing up in the UK, Ofili did not feel that the label of "African" truly fit him (Hynes 2001, 9). In 2005, Chris Ofili moved from London to Trinidad. He did so because he felt the need to escape his image as the black artist who decorated the virgin Mary with elephant dung. Ofili had visited Trinidad five years prior and was captivated by the island's raw beauty which brought out new heights of creativity for the artist.

While Ofili expressed that he may not have felt "African" and did not want to be identified solely as a black artist, his art is certainly still of importance for people of African descent. During a panel discussion about Chris Ofili and his work, the black British author, critic and playwright Bonnie Greer speaks on the narrative that is seen on Ofili's canvases about the African diaspora and the sense of double consciousness. According to Greer, even though Ofili may or may not intend to use his art to speak on such topics, he still does so simply because he expresses his own honesty and truth through his work (Marlow et al. 2010).

METHODOLOGY

This section discusses the methodology that is chosen for this research. It concerns both why the particular strategy is chosen and how it will be applied. As part of this thesis, the approach of semiology is used to analyze and compare paintings by the American artist Jean-Michel Basquiat and the UK artist Chris Ofili. The choice to include visual artists from the United States and the United Kingdom is due to the fact that both countries represent one of the areas of the Black Atlantic, and each has some of the largest populations of people of African descent outside of the continent of Africa. Both Jean-Michel Basquiat and Chris Ofili have been named among the most popular and influential black artists of their countries, and are known to use their art to comment on issues of race (Smith 2019).

The analysis will focus on how the painters use their art to comment on issues of race and power, as part of their own experience, with the use of symbolic exploration. Next to this, it will examine how the artists connect to the African diaspora through their paintings.

Semiology (or semiotics) is the study of signs and an approach to the analysis of meaning (Rose 2016, 107). The methodology of semiotics enables us to take apart an image and trace its workings through broader systems of meaning (Rose 2016, 106). The meaning of an image is created through the interaction of the message of the image and its audience. The most important element of semiotics is the sign. A sign may be a word, a sound or a visual image which stands for something else, thus it creates meaning beyond the object itself. Saussure divides signs into two components; the signifier (the sound, image or word) and the signified, which is the meaning or concept that is represented by the signifier. Roland Barthes (1967, 1972) applied Saussure's approach to signs to cultural practices to show how these convey meaning. Barthes argues that there are two systems of signification: denotation and connotation. Denotation is the literal and descriptive level of meaning, which is shared by members of the same culture. Connotation is the

meaning that is generated through the connection of signifiers to wider cultural concerns (Barker 2012, 79). Thus, by analyzing the connotative level of a sign, we can deconstruct the hidden meaning of works of art.

A sample of the artists' most popular works, ones that comment on race and black identity, will be selected from several exhibitions of which their art was a central subject. For Jean-Michel Basquiat, the artworks *The Irony of a Negro Policeman, Grillo* and *Tuxedo* are analyzed. For Chris Ofili, we examine *The Naked Spirit of Captain Shit and the Legend of the Black Stars*, *No Woman No Cry, The Holy Virgin Mary* and *Afrodizzia*. The different signs in the artworks are analyzed with the use of the semiotic methodology. Firstly, some background information is given about the analyzed painting. Next, the signs of the work are discussed to uncover their connotative meaning, revealing what they represent and the story they tell. To ensure that the signs are analyzed wholly, exhibition catalogues will primarily be referenced. These catalogues are books that are part of a specific exhibition, in which art curators and experts provide the reader with more information about the artwork presented and the overall themes of the exhibition. When necessary, further academic publications on the selected artworks may also be employed. Every work of art will be further analyzed and its connotative meanings will be explored. By discussing the topics they aim to represent, we examine how the artwork related to racialized social issues during the time it was produced, as well as how it relates to current issues of race.

In the discussion, the connotative meanings are categorized according to the following themes to which the artists aim to comment on: (a) being black in a western world and (b) being black in connection to the African diaspora. These themes correspond to the concept of transnational double consciousness, which we aim to explore in the thesis.

- Theme (a) being black in the western world, focuses on the use of markers that depict the experience of oppression and marginalization within the western society. It includes signs that reference the feeling of "Otherness" and inferiority that black people often experience when living in white-majority nations.

- Theme (b) being black in connection to the African diaspora, analyzes the use of markers of blackness in the artwork and how they relate to their African heritage and connect with the global African diaspora.

We will then compare the paintings and the connotative meaning of their signs to examine whether or not there is a resemblance in how black artists from different parts of the African diaspora use their work to comment on their race and the diaspora as a whole. With this, we will be able to explore the aim of this thesis, which is the connection of the African diaspora and their shared experience of transnational double consciousness.

ANALYSIS

Jean-Michel Basquiat: *The Irony of a Negro Policeman*, *Grillo* and *Tuxedo*.

The Irony of a Negro Policeman (1981).

Jean-Michel Basquiat has produced several works about state violence and law enforcement in the course of his career. Some examples are *La Hara* (1981), *The Death of Michael Stewart* (1983) and *Irony of a Negro Policeman* (figure 1). For Basquiat, these paintings were particularly personal, as they were manifestations of his own "state-instigated trauma" (Labouvier 2019, 22). This trauma came to a height in 1983, when Basquiat's friend and fellow black artist Michael Stewart was killed by two white police officers. *Irony of a Negro Policeman* is one of Basquiat's works that serve as a strong critique on members of the artist's own race, the black race. For Basquiat, law enforcement was inherently anti-black, and simply a legacy of colonialism and slavery in a contemporary white racist state. With this in mind, Basquiat perceived that police officers of African descent were only working to enforce rules that were meant to oppress them and their race. *The Irony of a Negro Policeman* was thus not only a commentary on white supremacy, but also on those individuals of African descent who reinforced it.

Title. The first sign note-worthy for analysis in this work of art is the title, "Irony of the Negro Policeman." The title is also found in the painting, situated right from the figure's head. However, spelled as "PLCEMN", the vowels "o", "i" and "a" from the word "policeman" are omitted. The erasure of these vowels seems to indicate that some aspect of a 'negro policeman's' identity may also be erased. They merely occupy a position in the system of law enforcement and with that, they are expendable (Braziel 2008, 198). While not mentioned as an official connotation, we must also consider the possibility that the erasure of vowels either references the bastardization of the word "policeman" as they way in which it is pronounced with a New York

City dialect. Furthermore, it may also connotate that the black policeman is not seen as a whole policeman, due to the color of his skin. He is not fully valued as a member of law enforcement and again, seen as expandable. The word 'IRONY' is then once more encircled in the top right corner, as a thought bubble. Basquiat believes that being a black man and being a member of law enforcement is inherently ironic due to the history of state violence against the black body. With this title he suggests that being a black police officer is a paradox in itself; one could (or should) not be black and be part of law enforcement, as it is a betrayal to one's own race (Labouvier 2019).

Pawn. With the word 'PAWN' Basquiat refers to the role the black police officer plays for the state. The officer is seen as a pawn, due to the belief that when a black man joins the police force, he also becomes part of the institution that is inherently against him and his entire race. A pawn is not only the weakest chess piece, it is also the first line of defense in a game of strategy whose objective is purely to protect the king. Hence, the word "pawn" represents the role of a black police officer, who is being used to reinforce a white supremacist state. The use of the word "pawn" to describe the black policeman also resonates with the previous sign "PLCEMN," through which Basquiat aimed to convey the message that the policeman is expandable. Overall, these two signs together portray the idea that a black police officer is expendable by the state, because the state does not see him as whole in the same way that is does in the case of a white police officer .

Colors. The relationship between the three main colors in the painting, white, blue and black, aims to portray the battle of dominance between what these colors represent. Naturally, the black paint symbolizes the black race of the officer. The blue color portrays the police uniform, while the white paints represents the white-majority society in which both the fictitious officer operates and Jean-Michel Basquiat grew up. Basquiat's use of the colors creates a

tension, by working against each other rather than with each other. For instance, the black and blue paint of the figure is abrupted by a white background, suggesting that police contact hinders the "proper integration of a whole coherent (black) self" (Labouvier 2019, 23). Thus, it references the dominance of the white society in which the black officer finds himself operating. The experience of living in such a society overshadows both his role as an officer of the law as well as his personal black identity. A fourth color noteworthy for analysis is red, which is somewhat randomly used throughout the painting. It is found in the figure's facial features, in the use of certain words, and as strokes onto the white background. The color red gives the skull-like face an extra aggressive dimension, while also emphasizing the words. Overall, Basquiat used the red paint to once again emphasize his views on black police officers: as brute individuals who are no better than their aggressive, white colleagues (LaBouvier 2019). In addition, one may also suggest that the red paint represents blood, as a reference to issue of police violence that Basquiat has commented on with this painting.

Hat: the hat worn by the policeman in this painting is portrayed as heavy and restraining. The hat transforms into bars around the officer's head, symbolizing a cage. The imagery suggests that the main protagonist is held hostage by the system he works for. He is trapped in the system of law enforcement, however this trap is a mental one. By not realizing that he serves a system that oppresses his race, Basquiat comments that the officer is mentally caged by his profession.

Grillo (1984).

Grillo (figure 2) is one of Jean-Michel Basquiat's most well-known paintings, often praised for its inclusion of both the artist's cultural and ethnic heritage, and personal history. The entire work of art is comprised of four parts, made from wooden panels. It includes two central protagonists, who seem to have traditional African influences. Yet, the entire painting has a

somewhat contemporary and urban appearance. His particular use of materials and graffiti-like features creates a more cosmopolitan feel to the work. With *Grillo,* Basquiat connects his New York upbringing with his Puerto Rican and Haitian roots, while also establishing links to Africa. Throughout the artwork, Basquiat employs double meanings to the signs, often western, Caribbean and African.

Title. The title *Grillo* has a double meaning, one that connects to Basquiat's personal heritage. The word derives from the Spanish language, referring to the artist's Puerto Rican side. However, it is not the Spanish meaning of the word (cricket) that Basquiat refers to. Rather, one has to consider the Spanish pronunciation to understand the true meaning of this title. The double use of "l" in "grillo" is pronounced as an "y" in Spanish. Due to this, "grillo" is pronounced in the same manner as the Haitian Creole word "griot." In the Creole dialect, "griot" is the name of a member of a west African tribe who keeps an oral history of his tribe through the role of a storyteller or poet. The use of Haitian Creole thus links to Basquiat's paternal, Haitian heritage (Mayer 2005; Stercken 2014).

Background. The background of the first and third panel is covered with different signs, letters and symbols. Many reference Robert Farris Thompson's *Flash of the Spirit* (1983), a landmark book on African art and philosophy, and its influence on African descendants in the West. Among other things, we find the nsibidi writings from Nigeria and the triangular 'leopard skin' symbol, which serves as a symbol of power in the Niger Delta. Next to this, the painting includes signs referring to the Rada religion of Haiti and images of Esu and Ogon, both gods of the Yoruba tribe in West Africa.

Griot. We once more see the influence of *Flash of the Spirit* through the two central figures on the first and third panel of the artwork. These two figures represent the griot character, an icon that is found in several other works by Basquiat (*Sabado por la Noche, Gold Griot* and

Flexible. All created in 1984). As explained through the title, a griot serves the role of a storyteller or poet in West African tribes. Through oral and musical storytelling, griots preserve the cultural and historical identity of their people. Basquiat strongly related with the griot character, as he aimed to tell a story through his artwork. These stories often concerned his personal life, as well as his own cultural heritage (Mayer 2005).

Skyscraper. Similar to many of the other signs in Grillo, the image of a building on the second, dark green panel of the artwork is suggested to have a double meaning (Stercken 2014). On one hand, the building seems to reference New York City, which is notorious for its numerous skyscrapers. Here, the sign serves as a hint to the urban environment Basquiat grew up in. On the other hand, the building also resembles a *sirige*, an African ritual mask associated with the Dogon tribe in Mali (Stercken 2014, 150).

Tuxedo (1983)

Tuxedo (figure 3) is seen as one of Basquiat's most important works, because it encompasses some of Basquiat's favorite themes: "royalty, heroism, and the streets" (Labouvier 2019, 23). The work is comprised of pages from the artist's own notebooks, which he re-used to create *Tuxedo.* The pages were placed in such a way that the boxes of words and symbols shape into an obelisk-like figure. The artist's signature crown is placed on top of the figure's head. Basquiat's career began as an graffiti artist and with *Tuxedo,* the artist wanted to introduce new way of tagging that was distinctive and "cool." As such, *Tuxedo* became Basquiat's "declaration that he still embraced the spirit of street culture," which is often synonymous with young, black urban life (Hoffman 2017, 172).

Text-images. The texts, images and symbols in Tuxedo appear chaotic, scattered as such that it becomes difficult to derive meaning from it. However, these small boxes of texts and

symbols represent the world Basquiat grew up in, that what he saw around him on the streets of New York City and what was portrayed to him through the media. When we look closely, we find the name "Malcolm X", an image of the Empire State Building and the American dollar bill, which all "appear alongside political commentary and salutes to black power" (Oddy 2019, 19). With *Tuxedo,* Basquiat created an homage to hip-hop culture. Similar to this work of art, hip-hop was originally concerned with sharing the narrative of young black men, and their struggle to find their place in the world. Thus, comparable to a rap artist, Basquiat tells his personal stories through the pages of his notebook and creates a narrative about "the quest for identity in urban black culture" (Hoffman 2017, 174). Next to this, the scattered nature of *Tuxedo* is also a tribute to rap music, as rap artists are known for their play with language, which often gives the song a chaotic feel (Hoffman 2017).

Three-pointed crown. Basquiat's famous three-pointed crown is part of many of his paintings, and serves as a symbol of majesty. He depicts them to pay tribute to the individuals he admires, black male heroes, most often athletes or artists. Basquiat's use of the crown is about upward social mobility for the black community, as it aims to highlight black achievement while also challenging the negative racial stereotypes about people of African descent that were much too common in mainstream society. Basquiat thus wanted to use his art as a platform for a new, more positive representation of the black community (Labouvier 2019).

Colors. For the silkscreen works, Basquiat originally chose to apply black texts and images on a white background. However, with *Tuxedo* he deliberately chose to reverse this and apply white texts and images onto a black background. With this aesthetic decision, Basquiat aimed to transform the meaning of the subjects and question certain social-cultural implications about black and white identity. As stated by Fred Hoffman "Basquiat demonstrated to both himself and the world that he possessed the capacity, through one simple act, to turn a world

dominated by white into one where black dominates" (2017, 95). Once again, similar to his use of the crown, this act was a way for Basquiat to highlight black achievement by placing people of African descent at the center.

Chris Ofili: *The Naked Spirit of Captain Shit, No Woman No Cry, The Holy Virgin Mary* and *Afrodizzia*

The Naked Spirit of Captain Shit and the Legend of the Black Stars (2000/2001).

The Naked Spirit of Captain Shit and the Legend of the Black Stars (figure 4) is part of the *Captain Shit* seminal series featuring the superhero in a total of ten paintings, which the artist began to create in 1996. Captain Shit is a superhero, which Chris Ofili created as he drew inspiration from some of the first and few black superheroes such as Luke Cage, Black Panther and Black Lightning, who appeared in American comics. *The Naked Soul of Captain Shit and the Legend of the Black Stars* tackles cultural black stereotypes, with the use of parody. Ofili described Captain Shit as his "slightly comical saviour of the day." (Ofili 1998, 83). By using stereotypes regularly found in American Blaxploitation films and the soul funk music scene of the seventies, Ofili comments on how black males are often portrayed as hyper-masculine and hypersexual in popular culture. It was during this time period that African Americans were continuously depicted as gangsters, obsessed with a life full of violence, drugs and sex. While the genre appealed to black audiences and was extremely lucrative, it also received much criticism for its damaging stereotypes and lack of a black cultural aesthetic (Sims 2016). Overall, by introducing elephant dung into the painting, the work serves as a mixture of urban black culture as well as Ofili's own African heritage.

Figure. As stated above, the artwork comments on the stereotype of the hyper-charged or hypersexual black male. This is done through several aspects found on the body of the main character Captain Shit. The hypersexuality is expressed through his naked body, as well as his prominent muscles, curly chest hair and intense red lips. Next to this, the figure has a large afro hairstyle, stereotypical of the funk music scene and often seen in Blaxploitation films of the seventies. An even more obvious feature is the figure's sexual endowment, which is prominently portrayed to symbolize the hypersexual nature of the black male.

Elephant dung. For Chris Ofili, the use of elephant dung in his paintings was initially a symbolic way to add a piece of Africa to his paintings. However, the use of dung also became a form of revenge for the Western exploitation of the African continent. Historically, Europeans had mutilated African elephants for their ivory, but by employing their feces into his artwork for people in the West to look at, Ofili offered a kind of grievances for those African elephants (Frieze Magazine 1994). Nevertheless, the use of animal dung was not uncommon in African art, and it has often been used in traditional masks.

Eyes. In the background surrounding the figure, black stars are portrayed. Within these stars, we find superhero mask-like shapes with cut-out images of eyes. The eyes together with their superhero-masks are intended to be worn by the characters of the Blaxploitation movies Ofili refers to in this painting, creating a sense of cultural nostalgia. Next to this, they serve to symbolize the black stars that played in these Blaxploitation movies and are included in the work's title (Sotheby's 2011).

No Woman, No Cry (1998)

No Woman, No Cry (figure 5) is one of Ofili's most popular paintings and helped him win the prestigious Turner Price in 1998. The large canvas depicts the profile of a crying woman,

set against a backdrop which is made up of a variety of abstract patterns. The woman portrayed in the painting is Doreen Lawrence. In 1998, Doreen's son Stephen Lawrence became the victim of a racist attack in London, which led to his death. Doreen became a known figure in the UK, as she fiercely campaigned for justice for her son after charges against the suspects had been dropped. After years of campaigning, a judicial inquiry into the police investigations found that the police force was institutionally racist, which led to a complete overhaul in legislations concerning British race relations (Hodge 2005). Ofili was deeply affected by the way Doreen Lawrence portrayed herself in the media, and used her silent grief to create change, all "with great dignity" (Hodge 2005). The words "R.I.P. Stephen Lawrence 1974-1993" are painted very faintly across the canvas. When the painting is presented in light, these words are barely visible. But when one sets it in darkness, it comes into view.

Title. The title of the artwork is based on the eponymous song title "No Woman, No Cry" by the Jamaican reggae artist Bob Marley. Bob Marley was known for his political messages about race and used his music to speak on black unification. In this song, Marley asks a woman to not be sad, a reference to the grief of Doreen Lawrence. The lyrics soothe the song's fictional woman, but they also discuss the hardships of Marley's community in Trench Town and how his community persevered through poverty. With the painting *No Woman, No Cry*, Chris Ofili has a similar message. He is not only touched by Doreen's sadness, but he also admires how her personal hardship created positive change.

Figure. *No Woman, No Cry* is compositionally very similar to the painting Magdalene Weeping, created in the sixteenth century (figure 6). Ofili is known for his references to Christianity and Christian art. By portraying Doreen Lawrence in a powerful profile position similar to the weeping Mary Magdalene, he not only compares her grief to that of the religious figure Mary, but connects the injustice of Stephen's death to that of Jesus Christ (Figes 2019).

Tears. If one zooms into the tears running down the face of the crying woman, we see in them small collaged images of a black man. The man depicted in these tears is Doreen's murdered son Stephen Lawrence. As stated above, Ofili was moved by the way Doreen's powerful silent grief eventually exposed institutional racism in the police force. These tears thus not only represent the loss of her son, but also the effect they had on British society.

Colors. The use of colors in *No Woman, No Cry* also serves as a reference to Africa. By employing black, red, green and yellow, an aesthetic is created that reminds us of the continent. This is due to the fact that these particular colors are widely represented in the flags of multiple African countries and even more so, are found in the flag of the Pan-African movement (Fusco 1999).

The Holy Virgin Mary (1996)

The Holy Virgin Mary (figure 7) is unequivocally Chris Ofili's most controversial work of art. The painting, depicting an abstracted expressionist black Virgin Mary surrounded by cutouts of female genitalia, caused such an uproar that the *Sensation* exhibition in New York featuring the painting was sued by the city's own mayor Rudolph Giuliani. With this painting, Ofili combined the use of elephant dung and pornography with the catholic imagery of the Virgin Mary. The depiction of a black Madonna speaks on the whitewashing of religion that has been done in Western cultures, as well as the African and Caribbean cultures that have mixed traditional spirituality with Catholicism (Nesbitt 2010). For the artist, *The Holy Virgin Mary* was about contradictions. The idea for the painting came from Ofili's observations of American gangster rap and the way black females were sexualized in the music genre. The work speaks on the stereotypes of the hypersexual black female, by juxtaposing "the profanity of the porn with something that's considered quite sacred" (Nesbitt 2010, 16). It was not received well by

religious viewers, viewing the work as blasphemy. Chris Ofili however, did not fully understand the outrage surrounding his art. As he stated in an interview, "when I go to the National Gallery and see paintings of the Virgin Mary, I see how sexually charged they are. Mine is simply a hip-hop version" (Roberts 2019).

Facial features. The Virgin Mary is portrayed with an unusually wide, red mouth and large nose. With this, Ofili aims to represent exaggerated black facial features that have been the subject of historical racial stereotypes. By depicting the Virgin Mary as a black woman and giving her stereotypical black facial features, Ofili addresses the whitewashing of religious figures that became the standard in western countries (Roediger 2002, 29).

Elephant dung breast. Traditionally, the Virgin Mary is portrayed with an exposed breast, which serves as a symbol for divine generosity (Cosentino 2000, 51). In *The Holy Virgin Mary*, Ofili covered the breast with elephant dung. By doing so, he actually further emphasized the traditional meaning of the exposed breast, as elephant dung is the "manure that nourishes African soil," thus certainly seen as a generous gift from the earth (Cosentino 2000).

Afrodizzia (1996)

Chris Ofili's *Afrodizzia* (figure 8) is viewed as "the ultimate manifestation of the artist's epoch-defining dialogue between black identity, stereotype and popular culture" (Sotheby's 2014). Ofili created two versions of *Afrodizzia*, both made in 1996. The work is a celebration of black creativity and successes, or as Ofili stated himself, a celebration of Afrocentricity (Eshun 2010, 98). Afrocentricity is a term that refers to the centering of the Pan-African perspective, prioritizing a sense of agency for people of African descent. As such, Afrocentricity was a global response to the global Eurocentric views in society and academia (Early 2020). Ofili's work highlights such agency by portraying those black figures he believes to have epitomized black

excellence and in turn, have contributed to the advancement of people of African descent in the West. The fact that Ofili mostly portrayed figures in the entertainment industry and sports is due to the fact that these were the avenues in which black social mobility was mostly achieved during and after the U.S. Civil Rights Movement (Sotheby's 2014).

Background. The explosion of vivid colors and glitter in the painting create a certain psychedelic feel to the painting, with a burst of vibrant energy to convey the positive message of the painting. Furthermore, the mixture of colors, glitter, resin and map pins reminds us of traditional African fabrics, "while also reflecting the cultural climate of 1960s psychedelics, 1970s disco culture and the influence of 1970s Blaxploitation movies" (Sotheby's 2014)

Faces. Throughout the painting, we find small cut-outs of black faces, all which belong to popular black figures. Among them we find music artists such as Dianna Ross and Michael Jackson, the athlete Muhammad Ali and political figure Nelson Mandela. Black popular figures of the 1960s and 1970s share the canvas with a new generation of black celebrities in the 1990s, hip-hop artists such as Notorious B.I.G. and Snoop Dogg. For Chris Ofili, the portrayal of these figures was his way of "revisiting the idea of black power in the seventies, but through a more celebratory lens —not fighting for power but celebrating a newfound power" (Eshun 2010). In this sense, the popularity of hip-hop and rap in the nineties was a renaissance of the black creativity that found its peak in the film industry and music scene of the seventies. *Afrodizzia* serves as a homage to that renaissance (Tomkins 2014).

Afros. The figures in this work all wear the same hairstyle as Ofili pasted cut-outs of black afros around every face, giving it a cohesive look. Similar to the figure in the work *The Naked Spirit of Captain Spirit and the Legend of the Black Stars*, the look reminds us of the popular characters often seen in Blaxploitation films of the seventies. However, *Afrodizzia* does not so much serve as a commentary to the damaging stereotypes of this genre, but rather the

depiction of afros is “an expression of universal respect”. By using afros, Ofili aimed to give the figures a uniform presence, taking the focus away from their personal achievements and redirecting it to their collective impact on black social mobility (Eshun 1998).

DISCUSSION

In the previous part, we have analyzed the paintings by American artist Jean-Michel Basquiat and the UK artist Chris Ofili. In this next section, we link our analysis to the overall focus of the thesis, which explores black identity, the black transnational consciousness and connection in the African diaspora. We do so by connecting the analyzed paintings of these two artists to each other and by discussing them in relation to the two themes previously introduced: (a) being black in a western world, and (b) being black in connection to the African diaspora.

Theme (a) being black in a western world

The works *No Woman, No Cry* by Chris Ofili and *The Irony of a Negro Policeman* by Jean-Michel Basquiat, are both examples of how the two artists use their art to comment on issues of race that are present in their society. The paintings are very personal expressions of the artists' thoughts and feelings on real-life racial violence. However, while Basquiat explicitly refers to white dominance as the motivation behind racial violence, Ofili stays away from this and solely portrays black grief in *No Woman, No Cry*, without including the system that was responsible for such grief. There is no imagery regarding the racist killers of Stephen Lawrence, nor of the institutionally racist police force that was involved. Nevertheless, both paintings still raise awareness about issues of white supremacy that are prevalent within the artists' own societies. This suggests an inextricable link between being black in Western societies and experiencing racism and the comparable effects on one's consciousness.

Basquiat's *The Irony of a Negro Policeman* especially, provides an excellent example of how people of African descent in the US may struggle with their identity and position in a white society. His use of colors, words and images in this painting reflect on how a white-majority society may influence the identity formation of black people, and how a struggle occurs when

operating in such a society. *The Irony* aesthetically represents DuBois concept of double consciousness: the inner conflict that emerges between one's own identity and how society portrays him. To refer back to DuBois description of double consciousness: "one ever feels one's twoness – an American and a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings…" (1903, 16-17). For Basquiat, the role of a police officer is inreconcilable with the identity of a black man, because such a role is embedded with institutional racism and the continuation of white supremacy. We once again find this in *Tuxedo*, where an homage to rap music simultaneously speaks on the quest to find one's position in society as black man.

It is important to understand Chris Ofili as an artist, in order to grasp the way in which he tackles issues of race in his artwork. In a 2010 interview, he stated the following: "A lot of black art that came before was set up to critique the system. I thought that was boring … I wanted to be sincere and outrageous and friendly and rude and experimental and conventional" (Tomkins 2014). Thus, it makes sense that Ofili does not comment on racist systems as explicitly as Basquiat does in his art. Even though he may not directly critique racist systems and ideologies, his art still tells us something about the experience of being black in a western world because he portrays the black grief that may be a consequence of such an experience.

Another way in which the position of people of African descent in the West is reflected, is through the commentary on black representation. In *Captain Shit, The Holy Virgin Mary* and *Afrodizzia*, Chris Ofili tackles black racial stereotypes by leaning in to them and creating exaggerated images. He uses parody and humor to comment on how black males and females are portrayed as hyper-charged and hypersexual. Such stereotypes are rooted in the discussed discourse of the "black Other" as primitive and uncivilized. The continuous portrayal of black people as hyper-charged or hypersexual has reinforced the ideology of black inferiority. Both artists understand the harm of such stereotypes, but they tackle them in alternative ways.

Basquiat focused on representing black people by giving them a sense of majesty. *Tuxedo*'s depiction of the signature crown for instance, intends to present positive, almost royal images of people of African descent. By depicting a revered religious figure as black in *The Holy Virgin Mary*, Chris Ofili does the same. However, Ofili's work largely employs a different tactic to tackle the issue of black representation. By employing parody, Ofili's work makes one critically consider the stereotypes and its effects. It exposes the societal position of people of African descent in society in a way that is familiar, because these images have been so widely distributed. Basquiat however, focused on representing black people by giving them a sense of majesty. *Tuxedo*'s depiction of the signature crown for instance, intents to present positive, almost royal images of people of African descent.

Nevertheless, while the artists may have different approaches, both still expose the hidden Eurocentric discourses about black people in their society. Whether it is through imitation or by presenting an Afrocentric alternative, their art serves as a form of resistance against the societal position of people of African descent in the West. It is clear that the experiences Basquiat and Ofili refer to, are very similar. They are primarily concerned with the subjection to racial violence and harmful representation in society. Due to this similarity, one could imagine that a black viewer from the UK could still examine Basquiat's art and see themselves reflected in this, and vice versa. Altogether, this suggests that there is indeed a shared experience of living in the West as a person of African descent, regardless of one's location within that region. Furthermore, this shared experience also leads to a comparable struggle of double consciousness.

Theme (b) being black in connection to the African diaspora.

Next to the experience of being black in the West, our analysis of Basquiat's and Ofili's artwork also provides us with insights about the connection of the African diaspora. Here, we

speak both of the connection within the African diaspora as well as the connection to one's African heritage and the continent.

The analysis of Basquiat's works *The Irony of a Negro Policeman* and *Grillo* reveals several interesting aspects about the artist. Firstly, it becomes evident that Jean-Michel Basquiat uses his heritage as an inspiration for his paintings. Here, we refer to New York City, the place he grew up in, as well as his parents' homelands Puerto Rico and Haiti. It is clear that these three places are significant to Basquiat, as we find many references to them. However, a fourth place of inspiration is found in the continent of Africa. The use of African figures, written symbols and masks is present in much of Basquiat's work and suggests an emotional link to the continent. Nevertheless, the way in which Basquiat refers to Africa is also noteworthy. The Africa which Basquiat portrays in his art becomes this imagined, almost magical place. The African signs in the paintings all refer to an Africa that is historical and tribal, one that had not yet been tainted by the slave trade and western imperialism, while references to a more contemporary, modern Africa are missing.

For Chris Ofili, whose parents are immigrants from Nigeria, we find fewer direct references to Africa in the analyzed artwork. However, his argumentation for using elephant dung does prove an emotional link to the continent. As stated in the analysis, the reasoning behind his use of dung is not only a form of revenge, but also simply a way to incorporate a piece of Africa into his art. However, we may also argue that, of all the African symbols one could use in his art, elephant dung is still a rather primitive object and highlights Africa in a natural, rural state. When we refer back to the literature on the African diaspora, we find that one of the characteristics of the diaspora was this view of Africa "as a social construct, an ancestral land people aim to return to, sometimes physically, but also on an emotional or psychological basis" (p. 7). Both Basquiat and Ofili seem to do just that with their paintings, as they connect with Africa through a variety of

cultural symbols, be it through a more imagined idea of Africa. What is interesting to note, is that while Basquiat and Ofili both aim to tackle Eurocentric views with their work, their portrayal of Africa in a traditional, almost untouched way is actually in line with such western views.

Next to the knowledge they provide about the societal position of people of African descent in the West, the depiction of black representations and racial stereotypes tells us something about the connectedness of the African diaspora as well. Although a black man who grew up in the United Kingdom, Ofili uses racial stereotypes created in American media. He references Blaxploitation films, the soul funk music scene of the seventies and hip-hop/rap culture, all art forms created by the black community in the United States. While this is not unusual, as American media is very much internationally distributed, it also shows that people of African descent outside of the US relate to these types of representations; thus, their effects on society have transcended national borders.

Furthermore, the focus on black creativity and achievement is not limited to a national context as well. With *Tuxedo* and *Afrodizzia,* both artists show a sense of black pride, for which they reference people of African descent from across the diaspora and Africa. The South-African Nelson Mandela, the Jamaican Bob Marley, and the American Cassius Clay are all examples of famous black figures that represent black achievement for the entire diaspora. Furthermore, their focus on Afrocentricity is very much intended to uplift black people from all parts of the diaspora, which suggests the existence of transnational black connectivity.

Let us more refer to DuBois' statement regarding a transnational black consciousness: "… the real essence of this [racial] kinship is its social heritage of slavery; the discrimination and insult; and this heritage… extends through Asia and into the South Seas. It is this unity that draws me to Africa" (Dubois 1940, 117). Through the analysis of Basquiat's and Ofili's art, we may conclude that the connection with the African diaspora for both artists is indeed a form of

resistance. However, this resistance is focused on perseverance and overcoming through the depiction of black achievement and pride rather than continued transnational struggle. Here, Africa serves as a connective piece, and a place of black pride. Despite the oppression that people of African descent have faced in their respective national contexts, it is through their connection to Africa and the diaspora that they reject their inferior status and uplift black identity.

Conclusion

How does the police killing of an unarmed black man in Minnesota lead to the removal of a statue of King Leopold II in Belgium? If one does not truly know the history of western colonialism and the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, one may not be able to understand this connection. However, when we examine the continuing impact it has had on black communities across the African diaspora, we can only understand why transnational black solidarity has emerged. Furthermore, it explains the emotional connection people of African feel with the continent of Africa. During the previous century, the realization that people of African descent shared a racial identity and experience with communities across the world, fueled several emancipation movements, from anti-colonialism to the Civil Rights Movement and anti-Apartheid. Today, we see a similar development happening once again with the global Black Lives Matter protests.

Over a hundred years after W.E.B. DuBois wrote about his concept of double consciousness, this internal struggle continues to persevere for people of African descent living in western societies that do not fully accept them. From that, we have also been gifted beautiful, real narratives about the struggle, from people who have lived and continue to live through it in their personal lives. Jean-Michel Basquiat and Chris Ofili both serve a crucial role. As internationally renowned artists, their works have been on the walls of some of the most prestigious museums and galleries of the world. And millions of people, from every race and background have seen their art and attempted to make sense of it. The popular saying; “art is a window into the soul,” could not be more accurate here, as Basquiat and Ofili’s art truly serve as a window into the experience of people of African descent. By exploring the meaning of an Ofili or Basquiat, one could educate one’s self on global issues of race. This in turn, could fuel more critical interracial dialogue that is needed today. But the works of these black artists do so much more. Their depictions of black

creativity and achievement includes the entire African diaspora, and uplifts black people who have been as inferior for much too long. And that is what their cultural legacy is all about.

Appendix

Fig. 1. *Irony of a Negro Policeman*, 1981.
Acryclic and oil stick on wood panel
72 x 48 inches (182.9 x 121.9 cm)
AMA Collection

Fig. 2. *Grillo*, 1984.
Oil, acrylic, oilstick, photocopy collage and nails on wood (in four parts).
96 x 211 ½ x 18 inches (243.8 x 537.2 x 45.7 cm).
Private collection

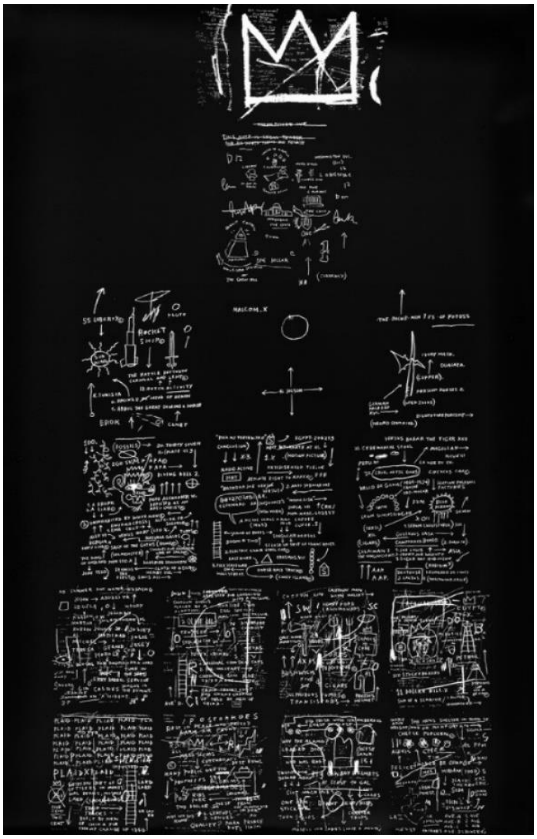

Fig. 3. Tuxedo, 1983.
Screenprint on canvas
102 x 60 inches (259.7 x 152.4 cm)
Edition of 10
Van de Weghe, New York

Fig. 4. *The Naked Spirit of Captain Shit and the Legend of the Black Stars,* 2000/2001.
Acrylic, oil, phosphorescent paint, paper collage, polyester resin, and elephant dung.
100 ¾ x 72 x 6 inches (255.9 x 182.9 x 15.6 cm)
Private collection

Fig. 5. *No Woman, No Cry,* 1998
Oil paint, acrylic pain, graphite, polyester resin, glitter, map pins and elephant dung
243.8 x 182.8 cm.
Tate Britain

Fig. 6 *Magdalene Weeping*, 1525
Oil on oak
52.7 x 38.1 cm
The National Gallery

Fig. 7. *The Holy Virgin Mary*, 1996
Acrylic, oil, polyester resin, paper collage, glitter, map pins, and elephant dung on canvas
96 × 72 inches (243.8 × 182.8 cm)
MOMA Collection

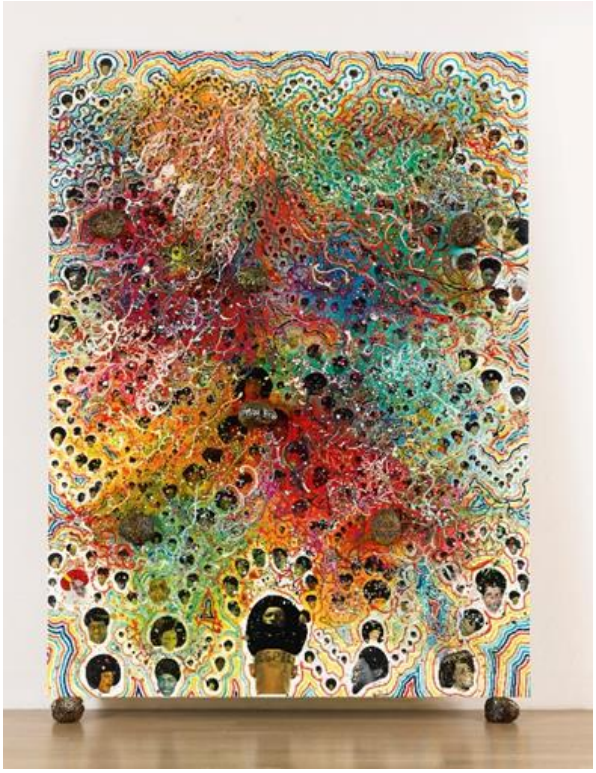

Fig. 8. *Afrodizzia*, 1996
oil paint, paper collage, glitter, polyester resin, map pins and elephant dung on linen
243.8 x 182.9 cm
Saatchi Gallery

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